MARÍA

JORGE ISAACS

Ann C. Jones.

March 1890.

A SOUTH AMERICAN ROMANCE.

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MARÍA

A SOUTH AMERICAN ROMANCE

THE TRANSLATION

By ROLLO OGDEN

AN INTRODUCTION

By THOMAS A. JANVIER

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE
1890

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INTRODUCTION.

It is a fact, but a fact not adequately appreciated, that American literature was born, and for a long while received its nourishment, in the Spanish colonies. The first book printed on this continent was a Spanish book. It came from the press in the year 1537: and it antedated the "Bay Psalm Book" by three years more than a century. In his scholarly "Bibliografía Mexicana," my honored friend Don Joaquin García Icazbalceta has produced a *catalogue raisonné* of all the books published in Mexico *before* the year 1600. His list includes one hundred and sixteen titles—and it ends twenty years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth. A little more than seventy years ago Dr. Berestain y Souza published his "Biblioteca Hispano-Americana Setentrional;" a work which, while confined almost exclusively to Mexican authors, contains upwards of twelve thousand titles distributed under nearly four thousand names. So far from abating, this extraordinary literary fecundity has increased steadily during the present century, while the quality of the

work produced has been steadily refined: for the genius of letters never has ceased to abide with the Spanish Americans among whom American literature was born.

It is but a part of our unfortunate lack of knowledge of all matters concerning these neighbors of ours that we are so ignorant of what they have accomplished in literature — to say nothing of what they have accomplished in other directions—during the past three hundred and fifty years. Of Mexico, because of the possibility of making cheap excursions thither by rail, a few of us have gained a superficial knowledge: but the names of the republics beyond Mexico — Guatemala, San Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and onward through Colombia and Venezuela into the vast region of South America—to most of us are names only; or, at best, are names which arouse in our minds but vague thoughts of sixteenth-century adventurers, and coffee-growing, and revolutions, and Mr. Church's landscapes, and filibustering expeditions, and the purchase of guano and hides. Of the real people, leading real lives, who dwell in these countries—of their achievements, and of what they have failed to achieve, of their social organization and customs, and especially of the intimate life of their homes—we scarcely could know less were they the inhabitants of another world. Indeed, to come to the matter immediately in hand, no apter illustration can be had of this ignorance on our part of interests which are very near to us than that there should be need to explain anything whatever to English-

speaking Americans in regard to a story that has been the admiration and the delight of their immediate neighbors, dwelling close beside them on the same continent, for more than twenty years.

In a business way we do, of course, know something of these otherwise unknown lands and peoples; but the information that comes to us through commercial channels is not of the most edifying nature, and it is highly objective in the matter of its point of view. By a happy coincidence, I find in this morning's press despatches an interview with an enterprising citizen of the United States who is described as being "engaged in the transportation business" in Colombia, and who just now is having built at Pittsburg a brace of steamboats for use upon the Magdalena and Cauca rivers. This person, in his way, probably, is typical; and, from his own stand-point, the views which he expresses concerning the people of Colombia are far from flattering. "The natives are not of an industrious or mechanical turn of mind," he says; and he adds: "At Bogotá the people think a great deal more of literary pursuits than of manufacturing."

No doubt this same opinion might have been expressed, with an equally just scorn, six-and-twenty years ago, when a certain young poet published in Bogotá a thin volume of verses. Jorge Isaacs, the author of these verses, was of mixed race—the son of an English Jew married to a woman of Spanish blood. He was born in the town of Cali, in the State of Cauca; but when only a lad—his father and his mother being both lost to him in death—he

found a new and, as it proved, a permanent home in the Colombian capital. The Bogotanos, therefore, claim him as especially their own; and "the cradle of his glory," they justly affirm, was Bogotá. Isaacs certainly did "think more of literary pursuits than he did of manufacturing;" as the publication of his volume of verses sufficiently showed. Being not less esteemed for his charming personality than for his genius—as is authoritatively declared by his fellow-townsman, who also was his editor, Señor Vergara y Vergara—his verses were received by the critical public of this little capital with a warm enthusiasm; and thus, doubtless, Isaacs was confirmed in his purpose to make literature the leading motive of his life.

All this seems very familiar and very real to me. I have never been in Bogotá, but once I lived for a while very happily in a certain other small Spanish-American capital that possesses, I fancy, many similar characteristics. There literature, both productive and critical, was, and no doubt still is, carried to a high degree of perfection; and there more than one young gentleman, in my time, suffered his hair to grow to an abnormal length that thus, in true Samsonian guise, he might the better woo the Muse. Because it is a tangible reminder to me of the queer and very pleasant life that I led in this contracted yet self-sufficing literary community, I cherish tenderly a little volume inscribed "Versos. Por Ricardo ——." I must confess that, for the most part, they are execrable verses, but, because of their association, they are exceedingly dear to me.

How good, or how bad, were these verses which Isaacs published I do not know, for my efforts to procure a copy of the volume so far have been vain. But in regard to his next literary venture no question can be raised touching the genuineness of its intrinsic merit or the perfection of the workmanship displayed in the making of it. Three years later, in 1867, he published "María," and so, at a stroke, won for himself enduring literary fame.

In the mass of critical comments prefacing the several editions of "María" which have been published in Colombia, in Mexico, and in Spain, the attempt constantly is made to draw a parallel between this story and the "Atala" of Chateaubriand and the "Paul et Virginie" of Bernardin de St. Pierre. Save in the obvious points of resemblance which are found in simplicity of theme and beauty of style, this suggested parallel does Isaacs injustice. Chateaubriand attempted to describe a region of which he had no personal knowledge, and, naturally, failed to impart to his work an air of reality. St. Pierre manufactured an absolutely artificial situation, and dealt with it in a vein of sentiment that even his delicately beautiful handling does not always save from lapsing into mere sentimentality. The essential charm of "María," precisely the reverse of all this, comes from the absolute knowledge that the author possesses of the life that he describes, whence follows the air of realism that everywhere pervades his work; and his fine literary intuition that enables him wholly to avoid sentimentality, although a most tender and exquisite sentiment ani-

mates his story from its beginning to its end. Guillermo Prieto says of "María," that it is "a reliquary of pure sentiment," and this is a poet's description of a poem in a genuinely poetic phrase.

Adding to and intensifying this charm of subject and this beauty of method, there is a solemn undertone of resistless fatality in the story that allies it—as Señor Altamirano well has pointed out—with certain of the Greek tragedies. The sunny landscape in which the action is carried on is made the brighter by contrast with a most sombre background—and this background, by a masterly use of cumulative effect, grows constantly more distinct and drearier as the foreground fades away and is lost. And in it all, the dominant characteristic is entire truthfulness to nature. To quote Señor Altamirano again: here is "truth contemplated by a man of genius and exhibited with an art that conceals itself in simplicity."

But the side of the story which comes nearest to my own heart—because of the warm feelings bred of pleasant memories which it arouses there—is its beautiful and its absolutely truthful portrayal of life in a Spanish-American home. The author shows, without any apparent effort to show it, the gracious relations existing between the several members of these charming households: which are ordered with a patriarchal simplicity, which are regulated by a constant courtesy, and which are bound together by an ever-present love. Homes of this sort, my own experience has convinced me, are not the exception but the rule in Spanish-America; and this perfectly-

finished picture of one of them, in its perfectly-described setting of a country-side community, exhibits the genius of the people more accurately than would an exhaustive study of all other phases of their life combined.

I cannot but hope, therefore, that the story of "María" will do something more than give delight to its readers by the beauty of its theme and by the excellence of its art. For I am well satisfied that, showing as it does these stranger neighbors of ours as they truly are, it must tend to the accomplishment of a larger and a higher purpose by fostering a desire among us to transform them into friends. This seems to me a most natural conclusion; for my own experience has shown me that they need only to be known in order to be loved. And no happier issue than this could come of the passage of "María" from the hearts of the Spanish-speaking Americans of the south to the hearts of the English-speaking Americans of the north.

THOMAS A. JANVIER.

February 5, 1890.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

It is a part of the faithfulness of Isaacs's transcript of life in provincial Colombia that he uses many words which are Cauca localisms. Several of these have been left untranslated, as having no equivalent, either as word or thing, in English—or, indeed, in Spanish. It is always sufficiently clear from the context, however, that they are names of animals, often onomatopoetic, or of plants; and nothing more could be conveyed by a roundabout translation. Special acknowledgments are due Señor Cárlos Martinez Silva, LL.D., delegate from the republic of Colombia to the Pan-American Congress, for valuable aid kindly rendered the translator.

R. O.

MARÍA

MARÍA:

A SOUTH AMERICAN ROMANCE.

I.

I WAS still a mere boy when sent away from home to study in —— College, founded a few years before in Bogotá, and then well known all through Colombia. The night before my departure, after the family gathering in the evening, one of my sisters came into my room, and, without saying a single word, because she could not trust her voice, cut off a lock of my hair; when she had gone, I found my neck wet with her tears.

I fell asleep sorrowful, filled with a vague foreboding of coming trouble. That lock of hair taken from a boy's head; that precaution of love against death, even in the presence of abounding life, caused my thoughts to wander all night about those scenes where I had passed, without knowing it, the happiest hours of my life.

The next morning, my father had to loosen my mother's arms from my neck. My sisters tried to

kiss away my tears. María quietly waited her turn, and stammering out a good-bye, touched her blushing cheek to mine, chilled by the first feeling of sorrow.

A few moments after, I was following my father, who hid his face from my eyes. The tramp of our horses on the pebbly path made my last sobs inaudible. The murmur of the Zabaletas, whose banks lay to our right, grew fainter and fainter. We were already rounding one of those hills in the path on which expected guests used to be looked for from the house; I threw a last glance backward: María was behind the creeper that climbed up by the windows of my mother's room.

II.

After six years, the last days of a splendid August saw me returning to my native valley. My heart was overflowing with love of home. It was the last day of my journey, and I was enjoying the most charming morning of the autumn. The sky was a pale blue; towards the east, and above the highest peaks, still half veiled, floated little clouds of gold, like the gauze of a dancer's turban stirred by an amorous breath. In the south hung the mists which had cloaked the mountains during the night. I was crossing plains carpeted with the greenest grass and watered by little brooks, the re-

sorts of droves of cattle which had left their resting-places for a plunge in the pools, or for browsing along paths arched over by trees thick with leaves and blossoms. My eyes turned eagerly to those spots, half hidden to the traveller by clumps of old giant-reeds, where were the houses of good friends of mine. My heart would have been unmoved then by the arias of U——'s piano; the perfumes I was drinking in were sweeter than those that clung to her rich garments, and captivating to my soul was the song of the numberless birds.

I was struck dumb by all this beauty, though I thought I had preserved it in my memory, because some verses of mine, admired by my fellow-students, gave faint suggestions of it. When, in a ball-room flooded with lights, echoing with voluptuous music, filled with a thousand mingled perfumes and with the rustling robes of fascinating women, we meet her of whom we dreamed at eighteen, and her glance makes the face flush, her voice hushes all other voices for us, and her flowers leave a nameless fragrance behind them—then we fall into a sort of celestial trance: our voices are powerless, hers we can scarcely hear, our eyes cannot rest upon her. But when, hours after, with our minds calmer, she comes again to the memory, our lips murmur songs in her praise, and it is that woman, her tones, her glance, her gliding over the carpet, we try to recall in the lyric which people think is purely ideal. So the sky, the horizon, the plains, the crests of Cauca,

make those speechless who behold them. The great beauties of nature cannot be sung at the same time they are seen; they must return to the soul, made dim by a faulty memory.

Before sunset I had seen my father's house whitening on the shoulder of the mountain. As I drew near it, I anxiously noted the groups of willows and orange-trees behind which I saw the glancing lights in the rooms. I was breathing, at last, the fragrance one never forgets of the garden he has seen planted. My horses' hoofs rang upon the pavement of the court. I heard a vague cry; it was the voice of my mother. She caught me in her arms, and drew me to her bosom. A mist gathered before my eyes; it was the work of perfect joy in an innocent nature.

When I tried to recognize in the women I saw about me the sisters whom I had left children, I saw María standing by my side: her eyes were concealed behind their broad, heavily fringed lids. Her face was the one to wear the deepest blush as my arm touched her waist; and her eyes were yet moist when she smiled at my first affectionate word, like those of a child whose tears have been dried by a mother's caress.

III.

At eight we went to the dining-room, which had a most attractive eastern exposure. From it could be seen the naked summits of the mountains against the starry background of the sky. The desert breeze played through the garden gathering perfumes, and rustled in the rose-bushes all around us. At times it would die down, and then could be heard the murmur of the river. Nature seemed to be displaying all her beauty that night, as if to welcome a guest.

My father sat at the head of the table, and placed me at his right; my mother sat in her usual place at his left; my sisters and the children were promiscuously seated, and María was opposite me. My father, somewhat aged during my absence, cast pleased glances at me, and smiled with his own peculiar expression of mingled raillery and affection. My mother said little: she was the happiest of all present. My sisters pressed dainties upon me, and there was always a smile upon the face of the one to whom I spoke. María kept her eyes hidden from me resolutely; yet I could see that they had the brilliance and beauty belonging to those of the women of her race, in the instant when,

in spite of herself, she let them fall full upon me. Her moist red lips had a prettily commanding curve ; once they revealed to me the beautiful arch of her teeth. The waves of her dark hair were confined in two long braids, and on one side she wore a pink. Her dress was of light muslin, almost blue, and a fine cotton scarf, with its purple folds, was drawn over her bosom and up to her white throat. I admried her beautifully turned arms, and her hands as delicate as a queen's.

When supper was over the slaves cleared the table ; one of them said the Lord's Prayer, and their master and mistress finished the evening devotions. I then fell into a quiet chat with my parents. María carried off the child that had fallen asleep in her lap, and my sisters followed her to their rooms ; they loved her intensely, and would almost quarrel for her favor.

My mother wished me to go to see the room which had been assigned to me. María and my sisters, already less timid, came to witness the effect upon me of the way in which the room was adorned. It was in the front of the house, its single window-casing being about the right height for a table ; the sashes and blinds were open, and branches of rose-bushes, in full flower, pushed in to complete the ornamentation of the window-seat, where was placed a beautiful vase of blue porcelain filled with lilies and irises, pinks and yellow narcissuses from the river.

"What lovely flowers!" I exclaimed.

"María remembered how much you liked them," remarked my mother.

I turned to thank her, and her eyes managed that time to meet my gaze.

"María," I said, "won't you keep them for me? for they are harmful in a sleeping-room."

"Is that so?" said she; "then I will take them away until morning."

What a lovely voice she had!

"Are there many as beautiful as these?"

"Oh, a great many; you can have them fresh every day."

Then my mother kissed me good-night, and Emma gave me her hand; María, too, yielding me hers for an instant, smiled upon me; it was the dimpled smile of my childish dreams of love—like the smile one detects on the face of a Virgin of Raphael's.

IV.

I SLEPT as I used to when a child, after being lulled to slumber by a fairy story told me by the slave Pedro. I dreamed that María came in to renew the flowers on my table, and that when she went out she brushed against the curtains of my bed with her skirt of gauzy muslin dotted with blue flowers.

When I awoke the birds were fluttering about

among the leaves of the orange-trees, in full song, and the perfume of the orange-blossoms filled my room as soon as I unfastened the shutters. Then María's sweet, clear voice reached my ears; it was her childish voice become more serious, and ready now to lend itself to all the intonation of tenderness and passion. How many times in my dreams an echo of that voice has since come to my soul, and my eyes have searched in vain that garden where I saw her, in all her loveliness, that August morning!

As soon as I had lightly clothed myself I opened the window and perceived María, together with Emma, in one of the garden paths; her dress was darker than the one she had worn in the evening, and her purple scarf, belted at the waist, fell over her skirt like a sash; her long hair, parted into two masses, half hid her shoulder and breast. Both she and my sister were barefoot. She was carrying a little porcelain vase, scarcely whiter than her arms, which she was going to fill with roses that had opened in the night, rejecting the less dewy and luxuriant ones. Laughing with her companion, she buried her cheeks, fresher than the roses, in the odorous vase. Emma suddenly discovered me. María observed it, and without turning towards me, fell on her knees to hide her feet from me, loosened her scarf from her waist, and throwing it over her shoulders, pretended to be playing with the flowers. The daughters of the patriarchs, gathering flowers in

the early dawn for the temple service, were not more beautiful.

After breakfast my mother summoned me to her sewing-room ; she wanted me at her side constantly. Emma and María were there embroidering. The latter began to smile when I entered ; she was thinking, perhaps, of the start I had given her in the morning. Emma began to ask me a thousand things about Bogotá ; commanded me to describe to them magnificent balls, elegant dresses, and the most beautiful women then figuring in refined society. They listened without giving over their work. María rose to consult my mother about the embroidery ; her light and noble walk revealed the unsubdued pride of our race, and the fascinating modesty of a pure and maiden soul. Her eyes lit up when my mother expressed a desire to have me give lessons to the girls in grammar and geography, studies in which they had made small advance. It was agreed that we should begin the lessons after a few days.

Somewhat later it was told me that my bath was ready, and I went to enjoy it. A thick and leafy orange-tree, loaded with ripe fruit, formed a pavilion above the broad tank of polished stone ; roses were floating in the water ; it was an Oriental bath, perfumed with the flowers which María had gathered in the morning.

V.

After three days had passed, my father asked me to go with him to inspect his ranches in the valley. My mother insisted strongly that we should return soon. María did not ask, as did my sisters, that we should return the same week; but her eyes were continually upon me while we were preparing for the journey.

During my absence at Bogotá my father had made great improvements: a fine and expensive sugar-mill, many acres of cane to supply it, large pastures with droves of cattle and horses in them, good stables, and an excellent house for the overseer were the most notable things about his farms in the *tierra caliente.* The slaves were well clad, and as happy as it is possible for slaves to be, and were docile and even affectionate towards their master. I found that the boys who, years before, had taught me to set snares for *chilacoas* and *guatines* in the thick woods were now men; they and their parents gave unmistakable signs of pleasure at seeing me again. But I was not to meet Pedro, my faithful friend and servant; he had shed tears when he placed me on my horse the day I set out for Bogotá, saying, "Dear little master, I shall never see you

again." His heart told him that he would die before my return.

It was easy to see that my father, without ceasing to be a master, treated his slaves with kindness. He was anxious for their domestic happiness, and fondled the little ones.

One evening, just at sunset, we were coming back with Higinio, the overseer, from the fields to the mill. They were talking about the work to be done; I was occupied with less serious things: I was thinking about the days of my childhood. The peculiar odor of trees just cut down, and of ripe cypress-cones; the clamor of the parrots in the neighboring reeds and among the guava-trees; the distant note of some shepherd's horn echoing among the mountains; the piping of the slaves as they slowly came from their work with their tools on their shoulders; the red glow in the sky seen beyond the fields of waving cane—all reminded me of the afternoons in which I, with María and my sisters, taking advantage of permission wrung with difficulty from my mother, used to gather guavas from our favorite trees, pluck bunches of cypress-cones, often at cost of many scratches on hands and arms, and spy out the fledgeling parrots in the hedges about the yards.

As we met a group of slaves, my father said to a young negro of remarkably pleasant appearance, "Well, Bruno, your wedding is all arranged for the day after to-morrow?"

"Yes, master," he replied, taking off his hat made of rushes, and leaning upon the handle of his shovel.

"Who are going to stand up with you?"

"Dolores and Anselmo, if your honor pleases."

"Very well. You and Remigia must be sure to go to confession first. Have you bought everything which you two need with the money I ordered given you?"

"Everything, master."

"And you want nothing more?"

"Your honor will see to that."

"Is it a good cabin Higinio has given you?"

"Yes, master."

"Ah, now I know what it is. You want a ball!"

Bruno laughed at this, showing his gleaming white teeth, and looking around at his companions.

"That's right; you conduct yourself well. Now you know what to do," he added, addressing Higinio, "you attend to this and make them happy."

"And will your honors go away before the wedding?"

"No," I answered him, "and we understand we are invited."

Bruno and Remigia were married the next Saturday morning. That night at seven, my father and I mounted our horses to go to the ball; we could hear the music from afar. When we arrived Julian the slave captain of the gang, came out to help us dismount and to care for our horses. He was in his Sunday's best, and there hung from his belt

the long knife with silver-plated sheath which was the sign of his office. One large room of the old farm-house had been cleared of its furniture for a ball-room. They had built a platform around it; in a wooden chandelier hanging from one of the beams a half-dozen candles were swinging; the musicians and singers, a mixture of slaves and freedmen, were stationed at one of the doors. There were only two reed flutes, an improvised drum, two rattles, and a timbrel; yet the fine voices of the negroes struck into the chants with such skill, there was in their songs such an affecting combination of melancholy and light and joyful chords, the verses they sang were so simple and tender, that the most cultivated ear would have listened with the highest pleasure to that half-savage music. We entered the room in leggings and hats. Remigia and Bruno were then dancing. She, with a blue flounced skirt, a girdle red-flowered, a white chemise embroidered with black, and necklace and ear-rings of ruby-colored glass, was dancing with all the ease and grace to be expected of her lithe figure. Bruno, with his woollen cloak folded about his shoulders, breeches of fine cotton cloth, a starched white shirt, and a new knife in his belt, was footing it with admirable dexterity.

That dance over, the musicians struck up their best tune, for Julian told them it was to be for the master. Remigia, urged on by her husband and by the captain, at last agreed to dance a few

moments with my father; but she dared not lift her eyes while she was doing it, and her dancing was rather constrained. At the end of an hour we went away.

My father was pleased with my attentiveness during our visit to the farms; but when I told him that in the future I wished to share his labors, and stay by his side, he informed me, almost sorrowfully, that it was necessary for him to sacrifice his ease for my sake, and that he should keep the promise made to me before of sending me to Europe to study medicine; I should have to begin the journey, he said, at the end of four months at the latest. When he told me this his face wore an expression of unaffected gravity, which was always to be observed in him when he had taken an irrevocable resolution. This happened the afternoon when we were going back to the uplands. It was growing dark, and but for this he must have observed the emotion which his decision caused me. How gladly should I have returned to see María, had not this announcement thrust itself in between my hopes and her!

VI.

WHAT had María been thinking of in those four days?

She was just placing a lamp on one of the tables in the parlor when I went up to greet her; I had wondered at not finding her in the family group that had met us at the very door. Her hand trembled so that the lamp was in danger of falling; I sprang to her aid, less calm than I thought I should be. She seemed to me slightly pale, and there was a suspicion of a circle about her eyes, imperceptible to a casual glance. Her face was turned towards my mother, who was speaking just then, so that I could not see it in a good light, but I noticed in her hair an overblown pink; it was undoubtedly the one I had given her the evening before setting out for the valley. The little cross of enamelled coral which I had brought for her from Bogotá, precisely like the one I had given to each of my sisters also, she wore suspended from a black ribbon about her neck. She was very quiet, seated between my mother's chair and mine. As my father's decision about my departure was all the while in my mind, I must have appeared sad to her, for she said to me in a low voice, "Did the trip tire you very much?"

"No, María," I answered, "but we have been so much in the sun, and have ridden so far—"

I was going to say more, but her confidential tone, and the light, so new to me, which I discovered in her eyes, prevented me from doing anything but gaze at her, until, observing that she was embarrassed at the involuntary fixity of my look, and perceiving that my father's eye was upon me (always most to be dreaded when a certain fleeting smile was playing upon his lips), I abruptly left the parlor and went to my room.

I closed the door. There were the flowers gathered for me by her. I bruised them with kisses. I tried to draw in at a single breath all their odors, hoping to find among them the perfume that clung to María's garments. My tears fell upon them. María! María! how much I loved you!

VII.

At the time of my father's last voyage to the Antilles his cousin Salomón, his dear friend from childhood, had just lost his wife. They had come to South America together when still young; and, in one of his voyages, my father had fallen in love with the daughter of the ship's captain, a brave Spaniard who, after having given up the service for several years, felt obliged, in 1819, to take up arms on behalf of the Spanish throne, and was executed in

Majagual on the 20th of May, 1820. Salomón married in Jamaica.

When the two friends met, after several years, Salomón, as has been said, was a widower. His wife had left him a little girl, who was then three years old. My father found Salomón in great grief and prostration. He offered to take the daughter and educate her with his own children. Salomón finally consented, saying, "She has been my only comfort since Sara's death, but her being here prevents me from going to India, as I much wish to, both for the sake of my health and on account of a fine business opportunity; since you want her, take her; she shall be your daughter."

Tears choked the poor man's voice as he spoke.

In a few days the schooner which was to bear my father to the coasts of Colombia set sail from the Bay of Montego. The light bark spread her sails, like a heron of our forests beginning a long flight. Salomón came to my father's lodging, carrying María on one arm, and on the other the valise which contained the child's clothing. She held out her little arms to my father, and Salomón, giving her to his friend, fell into a chair and sobbed aloud. That precious little creature was a sacred trust; my father knew it well, and never forgot it.

I was seven years old when my father came home, and I paid no attention to the presents which he brought me, having no eyes except for that little child, so lovely, pleasant, and smiling. My mother

covered her with caresses, and my sisters treated her with the greatest kindness from the moment when my father put her in his wife's lap and said, "This is Salomón's daughter, and he has sent her to you."

In our childish plays María soon learned to speak Spanish, that language so euphonious and captivating in the lovely mouth of a woman, or on the smiling lips of a child.

Six years passed by. Entering my father's room one afternoon, I heard him weeping; his arms were crossed upon the table, and he was leaning his head upon them. My mother was near him, also in tears, and on her knees María was leaning her head, without understanding this grief, and almost unobservant of her uncle's moans. A letter had come that day from Kingston, telling of Salomón's death. I recall but one expression of my father's that afternoon: "If I am to be bereft of all, without being able to receive their last farewell, why should I ever go back to my native land?"

Alas! his ashes were destined to rest in a foreign land, where the wind of the ocean, on whose beach he had played as a boy, whose expanse he had crossed as an eager young man, could not come to sweep from his grave the dried blossoms of the myrrh-tree and the accumulated dust of years.

But few of those who knew our family then could suspect that María was not the child of my parents. She spoke our language perfectly, was loving, spirited, and intelligent. When my mother used to ca-

ress her at the same time with the rest of us, no one could have guessed which one was the orphan.

She was nine years old. Her abundant hair, still a clear chestnut, loosened and rippling down to her delicate waist; her expressive eyes; her voice with a certain melancholy in its tones that ours did not have—such was the image which I carried with me when I went from home; such she was that morning behind the creeper at my mother's window.

VIII.

Early in the evening Emma knocked at my door to summon me to the table. I bathed my face to hide the traces of tears, and changed my clothes to give color to my delay. María was not in the dining-room, and in vain I tried to think what might have made her so late. My father noticed the vacant chair, and asked after her. Emma said that María had had a headache all the afternoon, and had already gone to bed. I endeavored to appear unconcerned, and forced myself to speak with enthusiasm of the great improvements I had found in the property. But it was all useless; my father was more tired than I, and went to his room early; Emma and my mother went to put the children to bed, and to see how Maria was, for which I thanked them in my heart, with no feeling of surprise at that sense of gratitude.

Although Emma came back to the dining-room, we were not long together there. Felipe and Eloisa, who had got me to play cards with them, accused me of falling asleep. Felipe had in vain besought my mother to be allowed to go with me up the mountain in the morning, and on this account he went away unhappy.

Reflecting in my room, I thought I could guess the reason of María's indisposition. I remembered the abrupt way I had gone out of the parlor, and how I had answered her so inconsiderately, through my effort to repress my own feelings. I would have given my life a thousand times over to obtain her pardon; but a doubt came to aggravate my distress —could I be sure she loved me? Why, I thought, should I try to believe that she loved as I did? I was unworthy of so much beauty and goodness. I accused myself of blind pride in thinking that I might be the object of her love, when all I deserved was her sisterly affection. In my stress of feeling, I looked forward with less dread, no, with pleasure almost, to my coming journey.

IX.

I ROSE the next morning at daybreak. The flush that was outlining in the east the peaks of the central cordillera was gilding a few light clouds that hung round the mountains, and that now began to

separate, slowly move away, and disappear. The green meadows and woods of the valley appeared as if seen through blue-tinted glass, and among them one caught sight of white cabins, spiral clouds of smoke rolling up the mountains recently burned over, and here and there the gleam of a river. The western cordillera, with its folds and hollows, looked like a succession of dark blue velvet mantles held at their centres by the hands of genii hidden by the clouds. In front of my window the roses and the leaves of the trees in the garden seemed to dread the first breeze that would come to brush off the dew now glistening upon them. It all struck me with a sense of sadness. I took my rifle; gave a signal to Mayo, the trusty dog who was seated on his hind-legs watching me fixedly, his forehead wrinkled in the excess of his anxiety to perceive the first order; leaped over the stone wall, and took the mountain path.

The mountain was fresh and tremulous under the caresses of the last night-breezes. The herons were leaving their sleeping-places, forming in their flight undulating lines silvered by the sun, like a sash abandoned to the caprices of the wind. Thick flocks of parrots rose from the reedy growths, on their way to the neighboring cornfields; and from the heart of the range, the *diostedé* hailed the day with his sad and monotonous song.

I went down to the precipitous bank of the river by the same path I had followed so many times six

years before. The thunder of the current began to grow louder, and presently I discovered the waters eager to plunge over the falls; once over, they were changed into whirling foam, then became smooth and glassy in the quiet stretches of the river; always the same bed of rocks shaggy with moss, the same fringe on the bank of *iracales*, ferns, and reeds with yellow shoots, silky plumes, and purple flowers.

I paused in the middle of the bridge—a gigantic cedar flung there by a hurricane. Flowering parasitic plants grew out of the slime, and bluebells and heliotropes swung down in festoons beneath my feet to dip in the water. The luxuriant and towering vegetation at times arched the river completely, and the rays of the rising sun broke through it as if through the broken roof of an abandoned Indian temple. Mayo howled in cowardly fashion on the bank I had just left, but on my urging, at last made out to cross the fantastic bridge; then he was off at once ahead of me up the path which led to the cabin of old José, who was expecting my visit of greeting that day.

Passing along a dark and sloping ridge, and leaping over the heaps of dead trees thrown down by the last mountain-slides, I came out into the little plot planted with vegetables, from which I could see the smoke of the hut, situated in the midst of green hills; though, when I last saw it, it was in an unbroken forest. The cows, of fine shape and markings, were lowing for their calves at the gate of the corral.

The poultry were noisily eating their morning meal. In the neighboring palm groves, which had been spared by the axe, the clamorous goldhammers quarrelled in their hanging nests, and, in the midst of their pleasant chatter, one could hear now and then the shrill cry of the bird-catcher, who, from his moat and barbacan, struck terror into the hungry macaws swooping down upon the cornfield.

The fierce dogs announced my arrival by their barking. Mayo was afraid of them, and kept by me whining. José came out to greet me, his axe in one hand, and hat in the other.

The little dwelling proclaimed industry, thrift, and neatness; everything was plain but convenient, and nothing was out of its place. The best room, which was scrupulously swept, had bamboo rush-bottomed seats scattered about, covered with bear-skins; some sheets of colored paper with pictures of saints on them were pinned with thorns to the unwhitened walls; on the right was José's bedroom, and on the left the girls'. The kitchen, built of strips of cane, and with a roof of the leaves of the same plant, was separated from the house by a little garden, where parsley, camomile, pennyroyal, and basil mingled their odors.

The women were dressed with more than usual care. Lucía and Tránsito, the girls, wore petticoats of violet-colored chintz, and fine white chemises; their collars were of lace, tied with black ribbon, and under them their rosaries were partly vis-

ible; their necklaces were of opal-colored glass. Their thick, jet-black hair was arranged in braids, which danced upon their shoulders at every movement of their bare, agile feet. They addressed me with the greatest timidity; and their father, observing this, encouraged them, saying, "Do you think it isn't the same boy because he has come back from college such a wise young man?"

Then they became more smilingly at ease; we were drawn to each other in the most friendly manner by the remembrance of games together as children—a remembrance which has great power over the imagination of a poet, or of a woman.

With advancing age José's face had gained much; although he did not let his beard grow, his countenance had an appearance almost patriarchal—as has that of almost all old men of good habits in the land where he was born. Abundant gray hair shaded his broad and sunburnt forehead, and his smile bespoke the tranquillity of his mind. Luisa, his wife, somewhat more fortunate than he in the contest with time, preserved in her manner of dress something of the city style, and her vivacity and pleasant ways made it clear that she was contented with her lot.

José led me to the river, and talked to me about his crops and his hunting while I was taking a plunge in the transparent pool whence the stream fell over a small cascade. On our return we found a tempting breakfast served upon the only table in

the house. Maize appeared in many forms—in porridge served on plates of glazed clay, and in golden griddle-cakes. The only knife and fork of the establishment were crossed upon my plate, which was white, with a blue border.

Mayo sat at my feet with an attentive gaze, though more subdued than usual. José was mending a fish-net, while his daughters, attentive though embarrassed, were carefully serving me, trying to guess from my eyes what I needed. They had grown very fine-looking, and from talkative children had changed into capable women. After I had finished the cup of thick creamy milk, the dessert of that patriarchal breakfast, José and I went out to walk about the garden and the clearing which he was making. He was astonished at my book-knowledge of seeds; and after an hour's talk we went back to the house, I to take my leave of the girls and their mother.

I placed in the good old man's belt the cutlass which I had brought for him; gave pretty rosaries to Tránsito and Lucía; and left in the hands of Luisa the reliquary which she had asked my mother to get for her. I then started down the mountain; it was precisely noon, so José said as he studied the sun.

X.

As I was slowly returning, the image of María again came into my mind. Those lonely spots—the silent forests, the flowers, birds, brooks — why did they remind me of her? What suggestion of María was there in the misty shadows, in the breeze stirring among the leaves, in the echo of the river? It was a very Eden; but she was lacking. I could not cease to love her, even if she did not love me. I drank in the perfume of the cluster of wild lilies which José's daughters had plucked for me, and thought that perhaps they might come to be touched by María's lips—so weak had become my heroic resolves of the night before.

As soon as I reached the house I went to my mother's sewing-room; María was there. She gave me a greeting, but then dropped her eyes to her sewing. My mother was delighted to see me come in, for she had been anxious at my being so long away, and had just sent some one to look for me. I talked to them about José's improvements, while Mayo was licking off the burrs that had stuck to my clothes.

María looked up again, and glanced at the cluster of lilies which I held in my left hand, leaning

with my right on my rifle. I thought that she w[illegible] them; but a strange fear, a regard for my moth[illegible] and for my resolves of the past night, kept me from offering them to her. But I pleased myself imagining how beautiful she would look with one of my small lilies in her shining hair. They ought to be hers, because she must have filled up my vase during the morning with orange-flowers and violets.

When I went to my room, not a single flower was there. If I had found a viper coiled up on my table it would not have caused me so great a shock. The fragrance of María's flowers had come to stand with me for something of her own spirit, floating about near me in my hours of study and of sleep. It was true, then; she did not love me! My dreamy imagination had been deceiving me. And this cluster of lilies which I had brought for her—what should I do with it now? If another woman had been there then, in that moment of wounded pride, of anger with María, I would have given them to her, for her to show to everybody. I put them to my lips, as if for a last farewell to a cherished delusion, and flung them out of the window.

XI.

I was unnaturally gay the rest of the day. At the table I talked enthusiastically of the beautiful women of Bogotá, and especially recounted the graces and wit of P——. My father seemed pleased to hear me; Eloisa would have liked to have me keep on till night. María said nothing, though I thought she was unusually pale. She kept on playing with Juan, and finally went out into the garden with the boy.

All the rest of the afternoon, and in the early evening, I had to help my father with his writing. At eight we were called to the dining-room. As we sat down, I was astonished to see one of the lilies in María's hair. There was on her lovely face such an air of noble goodness and sweet submissiveness that I felt as if magnetized by something in her that I had not known before, and could not leave off gazing at her. An affectionate and happy child, a woman as pure and charming as a dream—as such I had known her; but for her to be gentle and resigned before my angry pride—that was new to me. I felt unworthy so much as to look at her.

I replied confusedly to questions which they asked me about José and his family. I could not conceal

my perturbation from my father; but he turned to María, and said, with a smile, "That's a lovely lily you have in your hair; I do not remember any of that kind in the garden."

María replied in a low voice, "This kind grows only in the mountains."

"And who sent them to you?" asked my father.

María was embarrassed; she glanced at me, and seemed to find something new and encouraging in my eyes, for she replied, in a firmer tone, "Efraín threw some into the garden; and it seemed to me a pity they should be thrown away, they are so rare. This is one of them."

"María," I said to her, "if I had known you would like these flowers so much, I would have kept them for you; but they did not seem to me as beautiful as the ones that are in the vase on my table every day."

She understood now the cause of my resentment, and her glance told me so plainly.

That night, as the family was leaving the parlor, María happened to be seated near me. After much hesitation, I said to her, "María, they were for you, but I did not find yours."

She began to murmur some excuse, when my hand accidentally touched hers, and I seized it and held it involuntarily. She stopped speaking. Her eyes had a frightened look, and turned away from mine. She put her free hand to her forehead, as if in pain, and leaned her head upon it, burying

her bare arm in the sofa-pillow. At last she made an effort, and stood up; and then, as if finishing what she had begun, she said, though in so low a tone that I could scarcely hear her, "Then—I—I will pick the most beautiful flowers every day."

Then she disappeared.

Souls like María's are not ignorant of the common language of love; but they bow tremblingly at the first caress of the one they love, as the wood-poppy does under the wing of the wind.

I had confessed my love to María; she had encouraged me to confess it, humbling herself like a slave to pick up those flowers. I repeated to myself with delight her last words; her voice was still whispering in my ear, "Then I will pick the most beautiful flowers every day."

XII.

The moon had just risen, full and clear in the deep sky above the darkened mountains. It lighted up the ridges, whitened here and there by the tops of the *yarumos*, silvered the foam on the cataracts, and poured its melancholy light over all the valley. That silence, broken only by the roar of the river, was never more grateful to my soul.

Leaning my elbows on the window-sill, I imagined that I could see her in the midst of the rose-bushes, where I had startled her that first morning;

she was there picking up the cluster of lilies, sacrificing pride to love. Then it was I who was to make the untroubled sleep of childhood impossible for her hereafter; it was I who could tell her of love, could make her the object of my life. To-morrow! Magical word, the night we have been told we are beloved! Her glances, after this, would have nothing to conceal from me; she would make herself beautiful for my happiness and pride.

Never was a July morning in Cauca so lovely as María, when I met her the next day, a few moments after she had come from the bath; her hair loosened and half curled, her cheeks with the rose coming and going in them, and upon her lips that most pure smile which reveals in women like María a happiness impossible to conceal. Her eyes were now more sweet than brilliant. As she drew near me I observed a pretty and scarcely perceptible frown on her face; it was a sort of feigned severity which, afterwards, she often displayed towards me when, after having dazzled me with the full light of her beauty, she would impose silence upon my lips, which were about to tell her what she so well knew.

It had already become a necessity for me to be continually near her; I did not want to lose a moment of that existence which was now given up to love. I was greedy of happiness, even while perfectly happy. I spoke to María and my sister about their desire for studying with me; they were enthu-

siastic about the plan, and it was decided to begin that very day.

I taught them geography, used to read something in universal history with them, and very often pages of "The Genius of Christianity." I learned to appreciate María's gifts; she had a memory that let nothing go, and she took a childish delight in her advances in knowledge.

Emma had guessed our secret, and was pleased at our happiness. How could I hide from her, in those daily meetings, what was passing in my heart? Emma could not help observing my fixed gaze at the bewitching face of her companion, when I was giving some explanation. She could not help seeing María's hand tremble when I took it and placed it upon some point on the map, searched for in vain by her.

Whenever there was any domestic duty to attend to, it was always my sister who took it upon herself, leaving us alone for a moment. Then María, with a forced gravity on her face, though her lips would smile, would let me take one of her delicate, dimpled hands; and her tones, without ceasing to have their peculiar music, would grow slow and solemn as she spoke words which it would be vain for me to try to recall now: I cannot hear them any more, and when they are uttered by other lips they are not the same; if they were written on this page they would seem meaningless. They belong to another language, of which every phrase went from my memory many years ago.

XIII.

One afternoon, as I came down from the mountain, I observed signs of excitement on the faces of the servants whom I met in the corridors. My sister told me that María had suffered a nervous shock, and was still unconscious. She then tried to dispel my loving anxiety.

Forgetting everything, I went straight to the room where María was, and could scarcely control the mad impulse to press her to my heart and restore her to full life. My father was seated at the foot of her bed. He fixed upon me one of his intense looks, and then, turning towards María, seemed to be accusing me as he pointed to her. My mother was there: but she did not look at me. She knew of my love, and like a good mother, knew how to pity me.

I stood motionless, gazing at María, without daring to ask the cause of her sickness. Her face, half hidden by her dishevelled hair, wore a deadly pallor. In her hair were the flowers I had given her in the morning, now all crushed. Her contracted forehead spoke of unbearable pain, and a slight moisture was on her temples. Her eyes were closed; but tears had tried to force their way out, and lay glistening under her lashes.

My father understood my anguish. He rose to go out, but before opening the door he went to the bed and felt of María's pulse.

"She's getting better," he said. "Poor child! It's the same disease her mother had."

Her breathing was growing less convulsive. I stood at the head of the bed, and as soon as my father was gone, unmindful of Emma and my mother, I took the hand which lay upon the pillow and bathed it in the tears I could no longer keep back. I understood the full force of the calamity; it was the same disease her mother had. Her mother had died very young of an incurable form of epilepsy. This was the thought that was mastering and almost destroying me.

I perceived a slight movement in the cold and heavy hand. María was breathing more freely, and trying to say something. Her head moved back and forth as if trying to free itself from a crushing weight. Finally she murmured some meaningless words; at last I thought I could distinguish my name. I leaned over her, devouring her with my gaze. Perhaps I pressed her hand too hard, perhaps I called her. She slowly opened her eyes, as if an intense light were hurting them, and fixed them on me, trying to recognize me. Half conscious only, she said, "What is it?"

Seeing my mother, she added, "What has happened to me?"

We tried to quiet her; but she said, in a re-

proachful tone, which I could not then understand, "Now you see. I was afraid of it."

She remained profoundly sad. But when I came back to see her at night, she said, on taking leave of me, "Good-bye till to-morrow," and emphasized the last word, as she was accustomed to whenever any conversation of ours was broken off in the evening.

XIV.

When I went out into the corridor leading to my room a strong north wind was swaying the willows in the court-yard; and I could hear it sweeping through the orange groves in the garden, blowing the frightened birds from the trees. Fitful flashes of lightning, like the momentary reflection on a shield of a flame leaping up in the fireplace, seemed to be trying to light up the gloomy depths of the valley.

Leaning against one of the pillars of the corridor, heeding not the rain which beat into my face, I stood thinking of María's sickness, and of the dreadful words of my father. How I longed to see her again, as in those silent and calm nights which perhaps would never return!

I do not know how long I had been there, when something like a flapping wing brushed my forehead. I looked towards the neighboring trees, to follow its flight; the bird was black.

My room was cold. The roses at the window trembled as before a winter wind. In the vase, the irises which María had put there in the morning were already dry and shrivelled. A gust of wind put out my lamp. Thunder began to roll in louder and louder rumbles through the rocky ridges of the mountains. Yet my soul maintained a sad composure.

It had just struck twelve on the parlor clock. I heard steps near my door, and then my father's voice calling me.

"Get up," he said, as soon as I answered; "María is worse again."

The attack had returned.

In fifteen minutes I was ready to go. My father told me the latest symptoms of the disease, while Juan Ángel was quieting my black horse, which was restless and a little frightened. I mounted. The iron hoofs rang out upon the paving, and a moment later I was descending towards the valley, following the path by the light of the incessant lightning. I was going for Dr. Mayn, who used to spend the season in his country-house, three leagues away.

The image of María as she was when she said "Good-bye till to-morrow," went with me—alas! that to-morrow might never come—and the speed of my horse was not at all equal to my impatience.

The plains began to disappear, fleeing away behind me like great sheets whirled off by the hurricane. The forests which seemed so near retreated

as I advanced towards them. Only the roar of the wind through the *higuerones* and the *chiminangos*, only the tired panting of the horse, and the sound of his hoofs on the rocky path, broke the silence of the night.

I saw the cabins of Santa Elena on my right; soon I was out of hearing of the barking of their dogs. I sometimes had to draw up on account of cows asleep in the road. The fine house of the M——s, with its white chapel and grove of cotton-woods, appeared at a distance in the first rays of the rising moon, like a castle whose towers and roof had crumbled in.

The Amaime was sweeping down, swollen by the rains of the night, and I could hear its roar long before I reached its bank. By the moon's light, which was struggling through the trees on the shore, I could see how high the waters were; but I could not wait. I had come two leagues in an hour, and it was not much farther. I put spurs to my horse; he thrust forward his ears towards the river, snorting loudly, and seemed to be estimating the swiftness of the current; he stepped in, but then, overcome by unconquerable fright, reared backward. I patted his neck and dripping mane, and then pricked him again. He pawed impatiently, and shook his head violently so as to loosen the reins. I let him have his way, fearing that I had missed the ford. He went up the stream about twenty yards, grazing a rock; then he put his nose to the ground, and

plunged in. The water came at once up to my knees; in a moment the waves were dashing about my waist. I patted the horse's neck with one hand, and with the other endeavored to keep him a little up the stream, for, if we should fall below the landing, it would be impossible to ascend the high bank, where uprooted trees were beating in the surges. But the peril was over; the noble animal floundered out, and a moment afterwards resumed his gallop.

A quarter of a league farther on I crossed the waters of the Nima, quiet and crystalline, stretching away into the shadows of the silent forests. On the left I passed the meadow of Santa ——; and the house, in the midst of a cotton-wood grove, and under a group of palms which lifted up their leaves above the roof, seemed in the moonlight like the bower of an Oriental king, beneath the trees of an oasis. It was two o'clock in the morning when, after passing through the village of P——, I got down at the door of the doctor's house.

XV.

In the afternoon of the same day, the doctor took his leave of us, after having left María almost completely recovered, and prescribed a treatment to prevent a repetition of the attack. I felt an unspeakable relief on hearing that there was no danger. As

soon as the doctor and my father had gone, the latter to ride with the other for a league, I went to María's room. She was just finishing braiding her hair, looking into a hand-glass which my sister held for her. She blushed and put it away, saying to me: "This is not work for a sick person, is it? But I'm well again. I am not going to give you another ride so dangerous as the one you had last night."

"There wasn't a particle of danger," I replied.

"Yes, the river, the river! I thought about that, and many other things that might happen to you on my account."

"A three leagues' ride! Do you call that—"

"It was a ride in which you might have drowned yourself. The doctor said so; he was so astonished at it that he spoke about it almost before he felt my pulse. When he came back with you he made you wait two hours for the river to fall."

"The doctor is good for nothing on horseback; and besides, his long-suffering mule is a very different thing from a good horse."

"The man who lives in the hut by the ford," said María, "when he recognized your black horse, this morning, was astounded; for he thought the horseman had been drowned, the night before, who dashed into the river despite his warning shouts that it was impassable. Ah, no, no, I do not want to get sick again. Didn't the doctor tell you that I shall be well now?"

"Yes," I answered, "and he promised me to

come to see you every second day for the next fortnight."

"Then you surely will not have to take another night ride. What should I have done if—"

"You would have cried for me a great deal, wouldn't you?" said I, laughing.

She looked at me for a few moments, and then I added, "I could, in any case, die certain that—"

"That what?"

But she guessed the rest from my face.

"Always, always!" she said, almost as if to herself.

"And I have sad things to say to you," she went on, after a prolonged silence; "things so sad that they were the cause of my sickness. You were on the mountain. . . . Mamma knows all about it. . . . I heard papa say to her that my mother had died of a disease whose name I could not catch . . . that you were destined to a fine career; and that I—oh, I am not certain that it is what I heard, but I think it was that . . . that I do not deserve that you should . . . . should treat me as you do."

Tears were upon her pale cheeks; but she hastened to dry them.

"Don't say that, María, don't imagine it; no, I beg you not to."

"But I heard it, and it was after that that I fainted. Why then—"

"Listen, I beseech you. . . . I. . . . Won't you let me forbid you ever to speak of that again?"

She had let her head fall upon her arm, and I was pressing her hand between mine, when I heard the rustling of a dress in the next room; it was Emma coming in.

That night, at supper-time, my sisters and I were in the dining-room waiting for our parents, who were much later than usual. At last we heard them talking in the parlor, as if bringing an important conversation to an end. My father's noble face proclaimed, by the slight contraction of his lips, and the little perpendicular line in the middle of his forehead, that he had been engaged in a moral struggle which had affected him. My mother was pale, but made no effort to appear tranquil. As she seated herself at the table she said to me, "I forgot to tell you that José was here this morning to invite you to go hunting; but when he learned of the accident to María he said he would come back to-morrow very early."

"He must want to consult with you about his plan," remarked my father, abstractedly.

"He probably means to go bear-hunting," said I.

"Bears? What! do you hunt bears?"

"Yes, sir; it's fine sport. I've enjoyed it with him several times."

"In my country," said my father, "they would take you for a savage—or for a hero."

"But it's really less dangerous than deer-hunting, and that's done everywhere all the while; for, instead of having to shoot at something bursting out

on you unexpectedly between crags and water-falls, all you need is to be quick and a sure shot."

My father did not lose the slight frown from his face, but went on to talk of the way of hunting stags in Jamaica, and of the great fondness for the sport which some of his relatives had, Salomón in particular, who displayed the greatest skill in the chase; and of whom he laughingly told us several stories.

As we rose from the table he came up to me and said, "Your mother and I wish to talk with you. Come into my room."

After I had gone with them to his study, he said to me, in a quiet voice, "I desired to have your mother present at our conversation, because it has to do with a very serious matter about which she has the same opinion as my own."

He rose to close the door and throw away his cigarette, and then went on as follows: "You have been home three months now, and Señor A—— is to go to Europe at the end of two more. You are to go with him. This delay will not make much difference, not only because it is very pleasant for us to have you at home, after six years of absence, but also because it is easy to see that even here you take delight in study. I cannot conceal from you, and I ought not to, that I have great hopes, from your character and capacity, that you will be brilliantly successful in your chosen profession. You know that the family will soon need your aid, all the more since your brother's death."

He paused a moment, and then continued: "Yet there is something in your conduct that we do not approve. You are only twenty, and at that age an inconsiderate love for a woman may bring to nothing all those hopes of which I have just spoken. You are in love with María, as I have seen, of course, for many days. María is almost my daughter, and I should have nothing to say if your age and position would allow us to think of your marriage; but they do not; and María is very young. But these are not the only difficulties; there is another one which seems insuperable, and it is my duty to name it. María may overwhelm you, and overwhelm us, by a dreadful calamity with which she is threatened. Dr. Mayn is almost positive that she will die young, and of the same disease that was fatal to her mother. What she had yesterday was an epileptic seizure, which will grow worse with each attack, and finally become incurable; so the doctor says. Answer me one question now, reflecting carefully on what you say; answer me like the reasonable man and gentleman you are; and do not let your reply be dictated by a passion unworthy of you, when it is a question affecting your whole future, and that of those dear to you. You know now the doctor's opinion, an opinion which merits respect, coming from Mayn; you know what befell Salomón's wife: if we were to consent to it, would you marry María today?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"You would risk everything?"

"Everything, everything!"

"You have answered not only like a son, but also like the gentleman I have tried to make you."

At this my mother buried her face in her handkerchief. Touched by her tears, perhaps, and also, it may be, by the firm resolve he had found in me, my father left off speaking for an instant, feeling his voice fail him.

"Well, then," he went on, "since you have this honorable resolution, I am sure you will agree with me that you ought not to become María's husband until after five years. It is not for me to tell you that she, who has loved you from childhood, now loves you in such a way that it is the very intensity of her affections, according to Dr. Mayn, that has brought on the symptoms of her disease. What I do say is that you and she need to be very prudent. For the future I must get you to promise me, for your own good, since you love her so much, and for hers, that you will follow the advice of the doctor which he has given in view of this very contingency. You must give no pledges to María, since a pledge to become her husband after the period I have named would only make your intercourse more affectionate, and that is precisely the thing to be avoided. I do not need to explain this to you any further. By doing as I say you may save María—may avert the awful misfortune of losing her."

He paused and turned to my mother; then he

continued: "In return for all we grant you, you must promise me this: never to speak to María of the peril hanging over her, or of what has passed between us to-night. You ought also to know my judgment about this marriage, in case the disease continues after your return—it will be some years; in that case, as your father and María's, I should not approve the union. I ought also to tell you that Salomón in the last three years of his life accumulated a considerable fortune, which is in trust in my possession to become a dower for his daughter; but if she should die before marriage, it is to go to her grandmother in Kingston."

My father walked back and forth in the room. I supposed the interview was over, and rose to go out; but he seated himself again, and, waving me to my chair, began: "Four days ago I received a letter from Señor M——, asking María's hand for his son, Cárlos."

I could not conceal my surprise. My father smiled slightly, and resumed, "Señor M—— gives me two weeks in which to accept his proposal, or not, and in the course of that time is coming to pay us a promised visit. There will be no annoyance for you in that, after what we have agreed upon. So, good-night," added he, affectionately laying his hand upon my shoulder; "I hope you'll have a fine time hunting. I need a bear-skin for a rug at the foot of my bed."

"You shall have it," said I.

My mother took my hand, and holding it a moment, said, "We shall look for you back early. Be careful, won't you?"

I had been agitated by so many emotions in the course of the last few hours that I could not remember them all, and found it impossible to grasp my strange and difficult situation. María threatened with death; promised to me, yet after a terrible absence; promised, on condition that I should love her less! I, forced to moderate my affection for her, under pain of seeing her beauty disappear from the earth, and having to appear thereafter, in her eyes, cold and thankless, all because reason and necessity compelled me to! Mine or death's; between me and death; one step nearer to her, to lose her!

As I had ordered, Juan Ángel knocked at my door the next morning at daybreak.

"What sort of weather is it?" I asked.

"Bad, master; it's going to rain."

"Very well. Go up to the mountain, and tell José not to look for me to-day."

When I opened the window I was sorry I had sent the boy; whistling and singing, he was just disappearing in the edge of the forest.

A cold and unseasonable wind was beating down from the mountains, stripping off the roses, and twisting the willows; in its course it was sweeping along, here and there, a pair of migratory parrots. All the birds that were the pride of the garden on pleasant mornings were silent, and only the *pellares*

were whirling about in the neighboring fields, saluting the sad winter's day with their cries.

In a short time the mountains were hidden behind the gray veil of a heavy rain, whose swelling rush could be heard as it came on whipping the forests. In a half-hour, muddy and noisy streams were combing the coarse grass on the farther side of the river; the latter, steadily rising, thundered angrily, and poured its turbid floods over the distant rapids in waves that broke over the banks.

XVI.

Ten days had passed since that painful interview; not trusting myself to adopt the bearing with María which my father desired, and sorrowfully reflecting on the proposal of marriage made for Cárlos, I had embraced all sorts of pretexts for keeping away from the house. I passed those days either shut up in my room or in company with José—oftenest tramping aimlessly about out-doors. I usually carried a book, which I never read; my rifle, which I never fired; and took Mayo along, who tired himself out following me.

One morning, my mother came into my room, and seating herself at the head of my bed, from which I had not yet risen, said to me: "Things cannot go on this way. You must not keep on like this. I cannot bear it."

I kept silence, and she continued: "What you are doing is not what your father requested; it is much more. Your conduct is unfeeling towards us, and even more unfeeling towards María. I thought that the reason you went so often towards Luisa's house was the affection they all have for you there; but Braulio came yesterday, and said you had not been there for five days. What is it that makes you so unhappy, and drives you off so constantly into solitude, as if you could not endure being with us any more?"

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Señora," I replied, "María ought to be completely free to accept the good-fortune which Cárlos offers her; and I, as his friend, ought not to destroy the hopes of being accepted which he may with so much reason cherish."

"How can you imagine such a thing?" asked my mother, in surprise. "She can scarcely have seen your friend more than once or twice."

"But, my dear mother, there is only a little time now to wait for what I have thought to be either confirmed or disproved. I think it is well worth the pain of waiting."

"You are very unfair, and you will repent it. María, in her self-respect and sense of duty, is concealing the great suffering your conduct is causing her; she can control herself better than you. I can scarcely believe my eyes; I am amazed at what you have said. And all the while I was thinking I

should give you the greatest happiness, and make all right again, by telling you what Mayn said to us when he went away yesterday."

"What was it? Do tell me," said I, beseeching her.

"Why should I, after what you have said?"

"Will she not always be my sister?"

"It's too late for you to think that. Oh, I wouldn't have supposed you could act as you do! No, a son of mine ought not to do that. Your sister! And you forget that you are talking to one who knows you better than you know yourself. Your sister!—when I know that she has loved you since the time I used to put you to sleep together on my lap. And is this the time for you to say that—just as I was coming to talk to you, in fright at the suffering which the poor thing vainly tries to conceal from me?"

"I do not wish, even for an instant, to give you cause for such displeasure. Tell me what I ought to do to make amends for my censurable conduct, as you think it."

"That's much better. Don't you want me to love her as much as I do you?"

"Certainly, Señora; and you do, don't you?"

"So I do, and would, even if I could forget that she has no mother but me; for she fully deserves it. Well, the doctor says that María's disease is not the same that Sara had."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes; and your father, in his own great relief, wanted me to tell you."

"Then can I be with her as before?" asked I, feverishly.

"Almost."

"Oh, she will forgive me, don't you think so? The doctor has said there is no danger? Cárlos must know this," I added.

My mother looked at me in amazement.

"Why should it be hidden from him? I'll tell you what you must do, since the M——s are coming to-morrow—so they send word. You tell María this afternoon—but what can you say to her to explain your indifference, without disobeying your father? And even if you could speak of what he asked of you, you would not be able to clear yourself, since the cause of your actions during the past few days is something that pride and delicacy should keep you from revealing. This, then, is the result: I myself shall have to tell María the true reason of your unhappiness."

"But if you do that, and if I have been foolish to believe what I did, what will she think of me?"

"She will not think so badly of you as to suppose you capable of a wilfulness and vacillation which are more despicable than anything else."

"You are right, up to a certain point; but I beg you not to tell María of what we have been talking about. I have done wrong, though perhaps I have suffered for it more than she has, and I must make

amends. I promise you that I will make amends. Only, I ask two days to do it in the right way."

"Very well," said she, rising to go. "Shall you go out to-day?"

"Yes, Señora."

"Where are you going?"

"To pay Emigdio a visit; it is unavoidable, for I sent word yesterday to his father's overseer that they might expect me to-day at breakfast."

"But you will return early?"

"At four or five."

"Come to dinner here."

"Yes. And now are you satisfied with me again?"

"To be sure," said she, smiling. "Well, till afternoon, then. Give my best regards, and the girls', to the ladies."

XVII.

I was all ready to set out when Emma came to my room. She was surprised to find me in a happy mood.

"Where are you going in such a good-humor?" she asked.

"Would that I did not have to go anywhere! Why, to see Emigdio, who complains incessantly of my unfaithfulness whenever I meet him."

"How unfair he is!" she exclaimed, laughing. "You, inconstant!"

"What are you laughing at?"

"Oh, at the unfairness of your friend, poor fellow."

"No, no, you are laughing at something else."

"It's about this," she said, taking up a small comb from my wash-stand, and coming up to me. "You must let me comb your hair, for you must know, O faithful sir, that one of your friend's sisters is a monstrous pretty girl. What a pity it is," she went on, combing my hair in her graceful way —"what a pity it is that our little gentleman has grown a trifle pale these days, for the dear girls can't conceive of manly beauty without fresh color in the cheeks. But if Emigdio's sister were well acquainted with—"

"You are a great chatterbox to-day."

"Is that so? Well, you are quite joyful, anyway. Just look in the glass and tell me if I haven't fixed you up splendidly."

"What a visit it will be!" I exclaimed. Just then I heard María's voice calling my sister.

"It will indeed. How much pleasanter it would be to take a walk among the rocks in the cañon of the Amaime, and enjoy the magnificent and lovely view, or to wander through the mountains like a wounded bullock, frightening *zancudos* and letting Mayo get covered with vermin, poor thing!"

"María is calling you," I interrupted.

"I know what for."

"What?"

"To help her do something which she ought not to."

"May one know what it is?"

"No objection; she is waiting for me to go with her to gather flowers to take the place of these," she said, pointing to the vase on my table. "If I were she I wouldn't put a single bud there again."

"If you knew—"

"If *you* knew."

My father put an end to our talk by calling me from his room.

As I went to him I found him by the window, examining the works of a beautiful watch, and saying, "It is an admirable piece of work, well worth thirty pounds."

He turned to me and added, "This is the watch I ordered from London; just look at it."

"It is much finer than the one you carry," said I, scrutinizing it.

"But mine keeps excellent time; yours, however, is too small; you must give that to one of the girls, and take this one for yourself."

Without giving me time to thank him, he continued: "Are you going to Emigdio's house? Tell his father to get the field ready for our common pasture; his cattle must be ready, without fail, by the fifteenth of next month."

I went back to my room to get my pistols. María was in the garden just under my window, and was handing to Emma a handful of *montenegros*,

sweet-marjoram, and pinks; the most beautiful of all the pinks, for size and coloring, she held between her lips.

"Good-morning, María," said I, hastening out to get the flowers. She paled a little, but responded to my greeting, and as she did so the pink dropped from her mouth. She gave me the flowers, letting some fall at her feet, but picking them up again to hand to me; by that time she was all smiles.

"Will you exchange all these," I asked, "for the pink you had in your mouth?"

"I have stepped on it," she replied, stooping to look for it.

"Stepped on or not, I will give all these for it."

She remained in the same position without replying.

"May I pick it up?"

Then she took it and gave it to me without looking at me.

All this while Emma was completely absorbed, or appeared to be, in arranging some new flowers.

I pressed the hand with which María gave me the pink, saying to her: "Thanks, thanks! Good-bye till afternoon."

She lifted her eyes then, and her face had that most ravishing expression which a woman's countenance can wear—when upon it are mirrored together tenderness and shame, reproachfulness and loving sorrow.

XVIII.

Emigdio was a good boy. A year before my return to Cauca his father had sent him to Bogotá, with the purpose of putting him, as the excellent man said, in the way of becoming a merchant and man of affairs. Cárlos, who was rooming with me at that time, and who always managed to be fully acquainted even with things that he ought not to know anything about, ran across Emigdio somewhere, and planted him down in front of me one Sunday morning, first coming himself into our room to say to me: "I say, I'm going to kill you with pleasure. I've brought you the sweetest thing!"

I ran out and fell into the arms of Emigdio; he had stopped at the door, and cut the most comical figure that could be imagined. It is folly to try to describe it.

My fellow-countryman had come loaded down with a hat made of chocolate-colored skin, a thing that had been the pride of Don Ignacio, his father, in the long-past days of his youth. Whether it was too tight, or whether he thought it the style to wear it so, the hat was at an angle of ninety degrees with the long, sunburnt neck of our friend. His lank figure, his limp and straggling whiskers, mingling

with the most inconsolably abandoned hair that ever was seen; his flaming complexion putting the very bricks in the street to shame; his shirt-collar hopelessly hidden behind the lapels of a white vest most fearfully constructed; his arms imprisoned in the sleeves of a blue frock-coat; his trousers made of woollen cloth and stitched with broad bands of Spanish leather, and his shoes of dressed deer-skin, were more than enough to arouse Cárlos's enthusiasm.

Emigdio carried a pair of enormous spurs in one hand, and in the other an elaborate letter of introduction to me. I hastened to relieve him of everything, throwing a severe glance at Cárlos, who was stretched out on a bed, and stuffing a pillow into his mouth, tears in his eyes—a sight which for a moment upset me disastrously. I offered Emigdio a seat in our little reception-room. He chose an upholstered sofa, and when the poor fellow sat down he thought he was falling through, and thrust out violently to seize something to hold on by. Finally he got up as best he could, and said: "What the deuce! Cárlos, here, has no sense. No wonder he was laughing at the trick he was going to play me. And you, too! Why, you people are very rogues. You ought to be ashamed of what you have done." Cárlos came out of the bedroom, taking advantage of such a lucky opportunity to laugh at his ease.

"Why, Emigdio! Sit down in that arm-chair; there's no trap in that. You must."

Emigdio sat down with hesitation, as if he feared some new mishap.

"What did he do to you?" laughed rather than asked Cárlos.

"Didn't you see? I sha'n't tell you."

"But why not?" insisted the implacable Cárlos, throwing an arm across his shoulders. "Come, tell us."

Emigdio took offence at last, and we could scarcely mollify him. A glass of wine and a cigar ratified our truce.

In two days' time our Telemachus was decently dressed; and although his stylish clothes pinched him, and his new boots made him see stars, he had to submit, stimulated by pride and by Cárlos to endure what the latter called his martyrdom.

It was not long before he became firmly persuaded that our landlady's daughter, a lively and prankish girl, though not very prepossessing, was dying of love for him.

Such was, in fine, the downright country friend whom I was going to visit.

As I rode up to his house I heard him shouting out to me from within the court-yard: "At last, good-for-nothing! I began to think you were never coming. I'll be there directly."

He set himself to washing his blood-stained hands in the fountain within the court.

"What have you been doing?" I asked him, after we had exchanged greetings.

"We are butchering to-day, and as my father went off early, I have been directing the darkies—and it's a job. But I am free now. My mother has the greatest wish to see you; I'll go tell her you are here. It is doubtful if we can get the girls to come out; they are growing more untamed every day. *Choto!*" he called.

In a moment a half-naked negro boy appeared; one of his arms was shrivelled and covered with scars.

"Take this horse to the stable, and saddle the sorrel colt for me." Then, turning to me, after examining my horse, he said, "That's a fine black!"

"How did that boy hurt his arm that way?" I asked.

"Putting cane in the mill. Such stupids, they are! All he can do now is to mind horses."

Breakfast was served shortly, and I made myself entirely agreeable to Donna Andrea, Emigdio's mother, in the quarter of an hour we were together.

The truth must be spoken: the breakfast was no great affair; yet it was very well served. While we were eating, I caught a glimpse of one of the girls by peeping through a half-opened door; and her pleasant face, lighted up by great black eyes, made me think that what was hidden ought to harmonize well with what could be seen.

I took my leave of Señora Andrea at eleven; for we had agreed to go out to see Don Ignacio in the

pastures, where they were making a round-up, and at the same time to go for a plunge in the Amaime.

Emigdio mounted the colt, first taking the precaution to blind the animal's eyes with a handkerchief. The big colt bucked savagely, his tail between his legs; but his rider simply cried out, "There you go with your tricks," and gave him two sounding cuts with his Palmyra whip. Thereupon, after the horse had given two or three wild leaps, which did not so much as move Emigdio in his saddle, I mounted, and we set out.

As we were riding towards the scene of the round-up, about half a league from the house, my companion, when he had taken advantage of the first level spot to turn and rein in his horse, entered into a long conversation with me. He unbosomed himself of all he knew about the matrimonial intentions entertained by Cárlos. "And what do you say about it?" asked he, finally.

I contrived to avoid giving a direct reply, and he went on: "Well, it can't be denied, Cárlos is an industrious fellow. As soon as he finds out that he can't be a farmer till he throws away his gloves and umbrella, he will get on well. He still makes fun of me for using the lasso, making fences, and breaking mules; but he will have to come to it himself yet. Haven't you seen him?"

"No."

"Well, you will. Will you believe me, he will not take a bath in the river when the sun is hot, and will

not ride a horse without a saddle; all so as not to get sunburnt or dirty his hands. Still he's a gentleman, that's a fact; only a week ago he got me out of a scrape by lending me a couple of hundred to buy young bulls with. Of course he knows I'm good for it, but that's what I call being a friend in need. Now, about his marriage, I'll tell you something if you won't be angry."

"Tell it, man; say whatever you wish."

"In your family they live in great luxury; and I imagine that a girl brought up in silks and satins, as they say in the stories, would have to be treated in a very particular manner."

He gave a great laugh, and continued: "I say this because that Don Jerónimo, Cárlos's father, is a terribly rough fellow, and biting as a Chili sauce. My father can't bear the sight of him since they got into a lawsuit over boundary lines, and I don't know what all. Whenever my father comes home at night from meeting the man, we have to give him fomentations of herbs and brandy slings."

We had reached the place of the round-up. In the middle of the corral, under the shade of a *guásimo*, through the cloud of dust raised by the moving cattle, I discovered Don Ignacio. He approached to greet me. He was riding a lamentable bay nag, caparisoned with a saddle whose dilapidation bespoke its merits. The slight form of the rich landowner was decked out as follows: jaguar-skin leggings, much worn; silver spurs with jingling rowels;

a jacket of coarse sacking, and a very cottony wool cloak; crowning all, an enormous "Jipijapa" hat—as they call it when the wearer is riding at a gallop; under its shade, the tiny nose and little blue eyes of Don Ignacio had the same appearance as the projecting beak, and the bits of glass for pupils, in the head of a stuffed *paleton.*

I gave him my father's message about the cattle.

"Very well," he said. "Our young stock couldn't be better; they stand up well. Won't you come in and amuse yourself a minute?"

Emigdio's eyes could see nothing but the group of *vaqueros* within the corral.

"Hi there!" he shouted; "be careful with that lariat. Back, back!"

I thanked Don Ignacio, but excused myself. He continued: "Never mind, I understand. In Bogotá they are afraid of the sun or a fierce bull; that's the reason boys in college there simply waste themselves. If you don't believe it, just look at that nice boy of Don Chomo's; at seven of the morning I have met him with his head tied up in a handkerchief so that you see only one eye—and with a sun-umbrella; yet you, it seems, don't use those articles."

Just then came a shout from the *vaquero* who was putting the gleaming brand to the shoulders of the bulls stretched out and hobbled in the corral: "Another, another!" After each shout there was a bellow, and then Don Ignacio would cut a little notch

with his knife in the *guásimo* branch which served him for a whip.

As there was some danger from the animals when let up, Don Ignacio, after bidding me good-bye, withdrew to a safe place in a little adjoining enclosure.

The part of the river chosen by Emigdio was the best place to be found in the whole Amaime for a bath at that time of year, especially at that time of day. *Guabos churimos* over whose flowers thousands of insects were hovering furnished us dense shade and leafy couches on which to lay our cloaks. On the bottom of the deep pool at our feet we could distinguish the smallest pebble, and silvered sardines playing about. Farther down the stream, upon the rocks sticking out of the water, were blue and white herons watching for fish, or preening their feathers. On the opposite shore cows lay chewing their cud. Macaws, hidden among the leaves of the *cachimbos*, chattered sleepily; and high up on the topmost branches a troop of monkeys dozed in lazy abandon. On all sides the cicadas were giving their monotonous calls. Here and there a curious squirrel would peer over the edge of the gorge, and then swiftly disappear. From within the forest could be heard from time to time the melancholy trill of the *chilacoas*.

"Hang your leggings farther off," said I to Emigdio. "If you don't, we will come out of the bath with a headache."

He laughed good-naturedly, and hung them in the crotch of a tree at some distance.

"Must you have everything smell like a rose?" he grinned.

In the course of our bath, whether it be that night or the shore of a beautiful river are two things that predispose to confidences, or whether I contrived to draw them from my friend, he confessed to me that after having cherished for a long time, as a holy relic, the remembrance of Micaelina, our Bogotá landlady's daughter, he had fallen madly in love with a dear little creature of the neighborhood. This weakness he had sought to hide from Don Ignacio, who would be sure to try to break it all off, as the girl was not a lady. But Emigdio reasoned on this wise: "How could I ever persuade myself to marry a lady, when it would simply result in my becoming her servant instead of her becoming mine? And however much of a gentleman I may be, how the deuce would I get on with a woman of that class? But if you knew Zoila!—I tell you I'm not exaggerating—why, she would almost make you write poetry to her! Poetry, indeed! why, she fairly makes your mouth water! Her eyes are enough to give a blind man sight; her laugh is too cunning; her feet are just lovely, and her waist—"

"Slowly, slowly," I interrupted; "what you mean is that you are so desperately in love that you will go drown yourself if you can't marry her."

"I will marry her or burst."

"Marry a peasant girl? Without your father's consent? Well, you know best. You've got a beard, and ought to know what you are doing. And does Cárlos know about this?"

"Heaven forbid! That would be the end of everything. It's lucky that Zoila lives in San Pedro and doesn't come to Buga once in a dog's age."

"But you would let me see her?"

"Oh, you are different; I'll take you any day you choose."

At three in the afternoon I took my leave of Emigdio, making profuse excuses for not going to dine with him; and it must have been about four when I reached home.

XIX.

My mother and Emma came out to the corridor to welcome me. My father had mounted his horse and gone to oversee the farm-work.

Very soon they called me to the dining-room, and I promptly went there because I thought I should meet María; but I was disappointed. When I asked my mother for her, she said, "As those people are coming to-morrow, the girls are very anxious to have some fine dishes ready; but I think that they must have finished by this time, and that they will soon be here."

Just as I was rising from the table, José, who was going up the mountain, driving two mules loaded

with cane, paused at a point from which he could see into the house, and called to me:

"Good-afternoon! I can't stop, because I have a big load and night is coming on. I've left a little present for you with the children. Get up early to-morrow, for it will be a sure thing."

"Very well," I replied, "I will start very early. My regards to all."

"Don't forget the buckshot."

He waved his hat to me, and passed on.

I went to my room to get my rifle ready; not that it really needed cleaning, but I wanted a pretext for leaving the dining-room, since María was not to be found there. I had opened and held in my hand a little box of cartridges, when I saw María coming, bringing me my coffee, which she was stirring with a spoon. My cartridges fell all over the floor as soon as she drew near. Without looking at me, she said, "Good-afternoon," and put down the cup with a rather unsteady hand; then for an instant she let her timid eyes rest upon mine; she smiled, and dropping to her knees, began to pick up the cartridges.

"Don't you do that," said I; "I will do it afterwards."

"I have good sharp eyes," she replied, "to find little things like these. Where is the box?"

She reached out her hand to take it, and exclaimed, as she saw it, "What! every one dropped!"

"It wasn't full," I said, beginning to help her.

"And what do you want of these to-morrow?" she asked, blowing the dust off some of the cartridges which she held in one of her pink hands.

"What do you know about to-morrow and about these things?"

"Well, I know that this hunting is dangerous, and I imagine that it is a dreadful thing to miss a shot, and, besides, I know by the box that these are the cartridges which the doctor gave you, and said that they were English, and very good ones."

"You hear everything."

"Sometimes I would have given a good deal not to hear. Perhaps you had better give up this hunt —José left a present with us for you."

"Do you wish me not to go?"

"How could I ask that?"

"Why not?"

She looked at me, but did not reply.

"I think that must be all," said she, rising to her feet, and looking around the floor. "I must go now. Your coffee will be cold."

"You taste it."

"But don't stop to load your rifle now. It's good," she added, handing me the cup.

"Well, I'll leave the rifle now, and take the coffee; but don't go away." I had gone into my room and come out again.

"Is there much for you to do in there?"

"Oh yes," I answered, "getting ready for to-morrow. But must you go?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and leaned her head on one side, as if to say, "As you wish."

"I owe you an explanation," said I, going nearer to her. "Will you hear me?"

"Didn't I tell you that there are things which I do not want to hear?" she replied, rattling the box of cartridges.

"But I thought that I—"

"It's surely that you are going to speak of—what you thought."

"What?"

"That I ought to listen to you; but I ought not this time."

"How bad an opinion you must have had of me lately!"

She did not reply, and busied herself reading the lettering on the box.

"I'll say nothing, then. But tell me, what did you think?"

"Why should I tell you now?"

"Won't you allow me to apologize to you?"

"What I should like to know is why you did that; yet I dread to know it, because I can't imagine what motive you had, and I have always thought that you must have had one which I ought not to know. But, as it seems that you are happy again, why, I am happy too."

"I don't deserve that you should be so good to me."

"Perhaps I am the one who do not deserve—"

"I treated you unfairly, and if you will allow it, I will go down on my knees to ask your pardon."

Her eyes, which had been veiled for a few moments, now shone with all their beauty, and she exclaimed, "Good heavens! no. I have forgotten it all; do you hear? All."

"But on one condition," she added, after a short pause.

"Whatever you wish."

"If ever I say or do anything that displeases you, you are to tell me of it; and I will not say or do it again. That's very easy, isn't it?"

"And I, can't I ask the same thing of you?"

"No, because I am not able to give you advice, nor always to know if what I think is best; besides, you know what I am going to say to you before I say it."

"Is that true? Then you must be sure that I love you with all my heart," said I, in a low voice, and strongly moved.

"Yes, yes," she replied, softly, and almost touching my lips with her hand to tell me I must be silent, took a few steps towards the parlor.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Don't you hear Juan calling me, and crying because he can't find me?"

Hesitating for a moment, there was in her smile such sweetness and amorous languor that after she was gone I could still see her face.

XX.

THE following morning at daybreak I took the mountain road, accompanied by Juan Ángel, who was loaded down with presents sent by my mother to Luisa and the girls. Mayo followed us; his faithfulness was too much for his prudence, for he had received many injuries in expeditions of this sort, and was far too old to go upon them.

Once across the bridge, we met José and his nephew Braulio, who were coming to find me. The former at once broached to me his plan for the hunt, which was to try for a shot at a famous jaguar of the neighborhood that had killed some of his lambs. He had followed the creature's trail, and had discovered one of his lairs at the head-waters of the river, more than half a league above his cabin.

Juan Ángel was in a cold sweat on hearing these details, and putting down on the fallen leaves the hamper which he was carrying, looked at us with staring eyes as if he were hearing of a plan to commit a murder.

José kept on talking of his scheme of attack: "You may cut off my ears if he gets away. Now we'll see if that boastful Lucas is only the braggart

they say. Tiburcio I'll answer for. Have you got large bullets?"

"Yes," I replied, "and my long rifle."

"This will be a great day for Braulio. He wants very much to see you shoot, for I have told him that you and I consider shots very poor that do not hit a bear square between the eyes."

He laughed boisterously, clapping his nephew on the shoulder.

"Well, let's be off," he continued; "but let the boy carry this garden-stuff to the Señora, and I'll go back." He caught up Juan Ángel's hamper, saying, "Are these sweetmeats that María is sending for her cousin?"

"That's something my mother is sending Luisa."

"But what can be the matter with the girl? I saw her go by yesterday looking out of sorts. She was as white as a Castile rose-bud."

"She's well again."

"Here, you young nigger, what are you doing here?" said José to Juan Ángel. "Be off with that bag, and come back quickly, for it won't be safe for you to pass by here alone after a while. Not a word of this down at the house."

"Mind you come back!" I shouted to him, after he had crossed the bridge. He disappeared in the reeds like a frightened partridge.

Braulio was of about my age. Two months before he had come from Antioquía to live with his uncle, and was already madly in love with his cousin,

Tránsito. The nephew's face had all of that nobility which made that of the older man so interesting; but the most striking thing in it was a beautiful mouth, not bearded as yet, whose feminine smile was in strong contrast with the manly energy expressed in the other features. Of a gentle and yielding nature, he was an indefatigable worker, a real treasure for José, and just the husband for Tránsito.

Luisa and the girls came out to welcome me at the door of the cabin, smiling and affectionate as ever. Frequent sight of me in the past few months had made the girls less timid with me. José himself in our hunting expeditions—that is, upon the field of battle—exercised a paternal authority over me, but this disappeared when he entered his house, as if our true and simple friendship were a secret.

"At last! At last!" said Luisa, taking me by the arm to lead me into the humble parlor. "It's all of seven days! We have counted them one by one."

The girls looked at me with mischievous smiles.

"Dear me," exclaimed Luisa, observing me more closely, "how pale you are! That won't do. If you would only come oftener it would fatten you up like anything."

"And you, what do you think of me?" asked I of the girls.

"Why," replied Tránsito, "what must we think of you if by staying off there studying—"

"We have had such lovely things for you," inter-

rupted Lucía. "We let the first melon of the new crop spoil, waiting for you; and last Thursday, thinking you were coming, we had such delicious cream for you—"

"What a cunning flatterer she is!" said José. "Ah, Luisa," he added, "there's good judgment for you! we don't understand such things. But he had a good reason for not coming," he went on, in a serious tone, "a good reason; and as you are soon going to invite him to spend a whole day with us—isn't it so, Braulio?"

"Yes, yes, please let us talk about that. When will that great day come, Señora Luisa; when will it, Tránsito?"

She turned scarlet, and would not have lifted her eyes to look at her betrothed for all the gold in the world.

"It will be a good while yet," answered Luisa. "Don't you see that we must first get your little house whitewashed, and the doors hung? It will be the day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for she is Tránsito's patron saint."

"And when is that?"

"Don't you know? Why, the twelfth of December. Haven't these children told you that they want you to be their groomsman?"

"No, and I shall not pardon Tránsito for her delay in giving me such good news."

"Well, I told Braulio that he ought to tell you, for my father used to say that was the way."

"I thank you for choosing me more than you can imagine; and when the time comes I'll serve as godfather too."

Braulio cast a tender glance at his affianced, but she hastily went out, in her embarrassment, taking Lucía with her to prepare the breakfast.

My meals in José's house were not like the one I described before; I was now but as one of the family, and without any table service, excepting the one knife and fork, which were always given to me, took my portion of beans, corn-meal mush, milk, and goat's flesh from Luisa's hands, seated, just as José and Braulio were, on a bench made of roots of the giant reed. Not without difficulty could I make them treat me in this way.

Once at sunset, years afterwards, journeying through the mountains of José's country, I saw happy laborers reach the cabin where I used to enjoy hospitality. After grace was said by the aged head of the family, they waited around the fireside for the supper which the dear old mother passed to them; one plate sufficed for every married couple; the children frisked about the room. And I could not bear to look upon the patriarchal scene, which reminded me of the last happy days of my youth.

The breakfast was hearty, as usual, seasoned with a conversation which revealed the eagerness of José and Braulio to begin the hunt. It must have been ten o'clock when all at last were ready, Lucas carrying the hamper which Luisa had made ready

for us ; and after José's repeated coming and going to collect and put in his great otter-skin pouch bunches of wadding and a variety of other things which had been forgotten, we set out.

There were five hunters—the mulatto Tiburcio, a peon from the Chagra *hacienda*, Lucas, José, Braulio, and I. We all had rifles ; though those carried by Tiburcio and Lucas were flintlocks — most excellent, of course, according to their owners. José and Braulio carried lances also, with the blades very carefully set in the handles.

Not a single available dog stayed at home ; leashed two and two, they swelled our expedition, whining with pleasure. Even the pet of Marta, the cook, Palomo, whom the very hares knew to be stone-blind, offered his neck to be counted among the able-bodied dogs ; but José sent him away with a *zumba !* followed by some mortifying reproaches.

Luisa and the girls stayed behind rather anxious, especially Tránsito, who well knew that her betrothed was going to run the greatest risk, since his fitness for the most dangerous post was indisputable.

Pursuing a narrow and difficult path, we began to go up the north bank of the river. Its sloping channel—if such could be called the wooded bottom of the gorge, spotted with rocks upon whose summits, as upon the roof of a house, grew curled ferns and reeds with flowering climbing plants twisted about them — was obstructed at inter-

vals with enormous bowlders, between which the current rushed swiftly, whitened with whirlpools and fantastic shapes of foam.

We had gone a little more than half a league, when José, pausing by the mouth of a broad chasm, dry and walled in by high cliffs, scrutinized some badly gnawed bones scattered over the sand; they were those of the lamb which had been thrown out the day before as bait to the fierce animal. With Braulio in advance, José and I went into the chasm up which the tracks led. Braulio, after going on about a hundred yards, paused, and without looking at us, motioned to us to stop. He listened to the murmurs of the forest; filled his chest with all the air it could possibly contain; looked up at the high arch formed above us by the cedars, and then went on with slow and noiseless steps. After a moment he paused again, went through a careful examination as before, and, pointing out to us the scratches on the trunk of a tree growing out of the bottom of the chasm, said to us, after a fresh study of the tracks: "He went up here. It's easy to see he's full of meat and drink."

The chasm came to an end twenty yards farther on in a sharp wall, over the shoulder of which, we inferred from the hollowed place at its foot, the torrents poured in the rainy season. Against my advice, we went back again to the river, and kept on up its course. In a little while Braulio found the tracks of the jaguar on the shingle, this time going

down to the edge of the water. We must find out if the beast had gone across the river, or if, as was most probable, hindered by the current, here very heavy and swift, he had kept on up the river along the bank where we were. Braulio strapped his rifle to his back, and waded across the stream; he had attached a rope to his belt, and José held the end of it so as to prevent a false step from causing his nephew to plunge over the cascade just at hand. We maintained a profound silence, repressing the impatient whining of the dogs.

"Not a track here," said Braulio, after examining the sand and the thicket. Just then he stood up, about to return to us, and poising himself on the top of a rock, motioned us to be quiet. He seized his rifle, threw it to his shoulder, aimed as if to shoot at something among the rocks at our side, leaned lightly forward, cool and quiet, and fired.

"There he is!" he shouted, pointing to the bushes growing among the rocks, into which we could not see; then he leaped down to the water's edge and added:

"Keep the rope taut! Let the dogs go up there!"

The dogs seemed to understand what had happened. Scarcely had we loosed them when they disappeared in the gorges at our right, while José was helping Braulio across the river.

"Keep quiet!" said Braulio, as soon as he gained the bank; and while he was hurriedly loading his

rifle he added, seeing me, "You come with me, young master."

The dogs were already close on the prey, and it seemed as if the brute were not finding it easy to get away, since the barking all came from one point. Braulio took a lance from José's hand, saying to us two: "You go above and below to guard this pass, for the jaguar will double on his trail if he gets away from us where he is. Tiburcio will stay with you."

Then he said to Lucas, "We two will go round and come out on top of the hill."

With his usual sweet smile, and with the coolest manner, he finished loading his rifle.

"It's a dear little cat, and I hit him." As he said this we separated. José, Tiburcio, and I climbed upon a convenient rock. Tiburcio kept looking at the priming of his rifle. José was all eyes. From where we were we could see all that was happening on the hill, and could guard the pass as requested, for there were but few trees intervening, though they were large ones.

Of the six dogs two were already *hors de combat;* one of them lying mangled at the feet of the fierce animal; the other, with entrails protruding between broken ribs, had come to find us, and giving forth the most heart-rending cries, died at the foot of the rock upon which we had climbed. With his side turned to a clump of oaks, his tail playing about like a serpent, his back erect, his eyes flaming, and his

teeth bared, the jaguar was uttering hoarse cries, and as he threw his enormous head about, his ears made a noise something like castanets. As he turned about, worried by the dogs, who were not much injured although not wholly unharmed, we could see that his left flank was bleeding; he tried to lick it from time to time, but this only gave the pack an advantage in rushing at him.

Braulio and Lucas appeared, emerging from the gorge and coming out upon the hill, though a little farther from the brute than we were; Lucas was livid. There was thus a triangle formed by the hunters and their game, so that both groups could fire at the same time without danger of injuring each other.

"Let's all fire together!" shouted José.

"No, no; we'll hit the dogs!" replied Braulio; then he left his companion and was lost to our sight.

I thought that a general volley would end the matter; but it was almost certain that some of the dogs would be killed, and if, by any chance, the jaguar should not be finished, it would be easy for him to play the mischief with us if all our weapons were discharged.

Suddenly Braulio's head appeared rising out of the gorge, a little behind the trees which protected the jaguar in the rear; his mouth was half-opened with his panting, his eyes were dilated, his hair was flying. In his right hand he carried the couched

lance, and with his left he was pushing away the twigs which prevented him from seeing clearly.

We all stood silent; the very dogs appeared absorbed in the end of the adventure.

At last José shouted, "At him! Kill-lion, at him! Biter, Strangler, at him!"

It would not do to give the jaguar a breathing-spell; and setting on the dogs would make Braulio's risk smaller. The dogs renewed their attack all together. One more of them fell dead without a sound. The jaguar gave a horrible yell. Braulio was seen behind the clump of oaks, nearer to us, grasping the handle of the lance, from which the blade had been broken. The brute swung around in search of him. He shouted, "Fire, fire!" and leaped back at a single bound to the place where he had lost his lance-head. The jaguar followed him. Lucas had disappeared. Tiburcio turned olive color; he levelled, and pulled the trigger: his gun flashed in the pan.

José fired. The jaguar roared and bit at his flank again, and then sprang in pursuit of Braulio. The latter, turning his course behind the oaks, flung himself towards us to pick up the lance thrown to him by José.

The beast was square in front of us. My rifle alone was available. I fired. The jaguar sank backward, reeled, and fell.

Braulio looked back instinctively to learn the effect of the last shot. José, Tiburcio, and I were

all near him by that time, and together we gave a shout of triumph.

The mouth of the brute was filled with bloody foam; his eyes were heavy and motionless, and in the last agony of death, he convulsively stretched out his quivering legs and whipped the leaves with his beautiful tail.

"Good shot!—what a shot!" exclaimed Braulio, as he put his foot on the animal's neck. "Right through the forehead! There's a steady hand for you!"

José, with a rather unsteady voice (the poor fellow was thinking of his daughter), called out, wiping the sweat off his face with the flap of his shirt:

"Well, well, what a fat one! Holy Moses, what an animal! You son of a devil, I can kick you now and you never know it."

Then he looked sadly at the bodies of his three dogs, saying, "Poor Campanilla, she's the one I'm most sorry for—what a beauty she was!"

Then he caressed the others, which were panting and gasping with protruding tongues, as if they had only been running a stubborn calf into the corral.

José held out to me his clean handkerchief, saying: "Sit down, my boy. We must get that skin off carefully, for it's yours."

Then he called, "Lucas!"

Braulio gave a great laugh, and finally said, "By this time he's safe hidden in the hen-house down home."

"Lucas!" again shouted José, paying no attention to what his nephew was saying; but when he saw us both laughing, he asked, "What's the joke?"

"Uncle, the boaster flew away as soon as I broke my lance."

José looked at us as if he could not possibly understand.

"Oh, the cowardly scoundrel!"

Then he went down by the river, and shouted till the mountains echoed his voice, "Lucas, you rogue!"

"I've got a good knife here to skin him with," said Tiburcio.

"No, man, it isn't that, but that wretch was carrying the hamper with our lunch, and this boy wants something to eat; and so do I, but I don't see any prospect of much hereabouts."

But, in fact, the desired hamper was the very thing which marked the spot whence the fellow had fled as he dropped it. José brought it to us rejoicing, and proceeded to open it, meanwhile ordering Tiburcio to fill our cups with water from the river. The food was white and violet green-corn, fresh cheese, and nicely roasted meat; all this was wrapped up in banana leaves. Then there appeared, in addition, a bottle of wine rolled in a napkin, bread, cherries, and dried figs. These last articles José put one side, saying, "That's a separate account."

The huge knives came out of their sheaths. José cut up the meat for us, and this, with the corn, made a dish fit for a king. We drank the wine, made

havoc with the bread, and finished the figs and cherries, which were more to the taste of my companions than to mine. Corn-cake was not lacking, that pleasant companion of the traveller, the hunter, and the poor man. The water was ice-cold. My best cigars ended the rustic banquet.

José was in fine spirits, and Braulio had ventured to call me *padrino*. With wonderful dexterity Tiburcio flayed the jaguar, carefully taking out all the fat, which, they say, is excellent for I don't know what not.

After getting the jaguar's skin, with his head and paws, into convenient bundles, we set out on our return to José's cabin; he took my rifle on the same shoulder with his own, and went on ahead, calling the dogs. From time to time he would stop to go over some feature of the chase, or to give vent to a new word of contempt for Lucas.

Of course the women had been counting and recounting us from the moment we came in sight; and when we drew near the house they were still wavering between alarm and joy, since on account of our delay and the shots they had heard they knew we must have incurred some danger. It was Tránsito who came forward to welcome us, and she was perceptibly pale.

"Did you kill him?" she called.

"Yes, my daughter," replied her father.

They all surrounded us, even old Marta, who had in her hands a half-plucked capon. Lucía came up

to ask me about my rifle, and as I was showing it to her she added, in a low voice, "There was no accident, was there?"

"None whatever," I answered, affectionately tapping her lips with a twig I had in my hand.

"Oh, I was thinking—"

"Hasn't that ridiculous Lucas come down this way?" asked José.

"Not he," replied Marta.

José muttered a curse.

"But where is what you killed?" finally asked Luisa, when she could make herself heard.

"Here, aunt," answered Braulio, and with the aid of his betrothed he began to undo the bundle, saying something to the girl which I could not hear. She looked at me in a very strange way, and brought out of the house a little bench for me, upon which I sat and looked on. As soon as the large and velvety skin had been spread out in the court-yard, the women gave a cry; but when the head rolled upon the grass they were almost beside themselves.

"Why, how did you kill him? Tell us," said Luisa. All looked a little frightened.

"Do tell us," added Lucía.

Then José, taking the head of the jaguar in his hands, said, "The jaguar was just going to kill Braulio when the Señor gave him this ball." He pointed to the hole in the forehead. All looked at me, and in each one of those glances there was recompense enough for an action which really deserved none.

José went on to give the details of the expedition, meanwhile attending to the wounds of the dogs, and bewailing the loss of the three that had been killed. Braulio and Tiburcio wrapped up the skin.

The women went back to their tasks, and I took a nap in the little parlor on the bed which Tránsito and Lucía had improvised for me upon one of the benches. My lullaby was the murmur of the river, the cries of the geese, the lowing of the cattle pastured on the hills near by, and the songs of the girls washing clothes in the brook. Nature is the most loving of mothers when grief has taken possession of our souls; and if happiness is our lot, she smiles upon us.

XXI.

The urgent invitation of the mountaineers induced me to stay with them till four in the afternoon, and then, after prolonged good-byes, I started home in company with Braulio, who insisted upon going with me. He had relieved me of the weight of my rifle, and also carried a bag on his shoulder.

We had crossed the river, and were beginning to descend the broken flank of the mountain, when Juan Ángel, rising up in a clump of mulberry-trees, stretched out his hands to me in a supplicating attitude, and said, "I came, my master—I was going—but don't punish me, your honor—and I won't be afraid again."

"What have you done—what is it?" I broke in. "Have they sent you from the house?"

"Yes, master, yes, the young lady; and as your honor said that I was to go back—"

I did not remember giving him any such command.

"So you didn't return because you were scared?" asked Braulio, laughingly.

"That was it, that was the reason. But when Mayo ran by me in a great fright, and then Lucas met me as I was crossing the river, and said that the jaguar had killed Braulio—"

The young man gave a great burst of laughter, and then said to the frightened darky, "And you have been crouching like a rabbit in those briers all day?"

"Well, José shouted to me to get back quickly, because it wasn't safe to go alone up there, and—and—"

Juan Ángel stood looking at his finger-nails.

"Come, I'll stand up for you," said Braulio, "but only on condition that in the next hunt you are to go with me, step by step."

The darky boy looked at him distrustfully, uncertain whether to accept a pardon on those terms.

"Do you agree?" asked I, indifferently.

"Yes, my master."

"Well, let's go on. Don't take the trouble, Braulio, to go any farther with me; go back now."

"But I wanted—"

"No; you know that Tránsito has been much frightened to-day. Remember me to her."

"And this bag which I have — ah, you take it, Juan Ángel. Now, don't you break your master's rifle going down there; I owe my life to that. Well, that will be better," he said, as I took the weapon myself.

I shook the bold hunter's hand and we parted. When he was already quite a distance away, he shouted, "That in the bag is the sample of ore which your father asked my uncle to send him."

Seeing that I heard him, he disappeared in the forest. I stopped at twice the distance of a gun-shot from the house, on the bank of the brook, which rushed noisily down to lose itself in the garden. I looked about for Juan Ángel, but he had disappeared; I guessed that he was afraid I would be angry with him for his cowardice, and had resolved to seek a better defender than Braulio.

I was especially fond of the boy; he was then twelve years old, and was good-looking—one might almost say, handsome. Though intelligent, he was rather intractable. Feliciana, his mother, who had been a nurse in the family, and enjoyed all the consideration attached to that position, always hoped he would turn out a good valet for me. But aside from service at the table and in the bedroom, and a certain skill in making coffee, he was clumsy and awkward.

When near the house I perceived that the family

was still in the dining-room, and I inferred that Cárlos and his father had come. I turned to the right, leaped over the garden wall, and gained my room without being seen. I was hanging up my hunting-bag and rifle when I noticed an unwonted loudness of conversation. At that very moment my mother came to my room and told me the cause.

"The M——s have come," she said, "and you know that Don Jerónimo always talks as if he were trying to make himself heard across a river."

Cárlos in the house! I thought; this is the trying time of which my father spoke. Cárlos must have had a whole day in which to admire the object of his love. How can I keep him from knowing that I love her? And I cannot tell her, either, that I will be her husband. This is a worse trial than I had imagined.

My mother, perhaps seeing that I was preoccupied, said to me, "So you're come back unhappy?"

"No, Señora, only tired."

"Did you have a good hunt?"

"Excellent."

"Can I tell your father that you've got the bear-skin for him?"

"Not that, but a lovely jaguar-skin."

"A jaguar!"

"Yes, Señora, the one that did so much damage up here."

"Why, this must have been dreadful."

"My companions were very brave and skilful."

She had arranged everything I needed for a bath and a change of clothes; just as she was closing the door I asked her not to say that I had returned.

She came back, and in that sweet and affectionate voice which always made her irresistible with me, said, "You remember, don't you, what we were saying the other day about the visit of these people?"

Satisfied with my reply, she added, "Very well; I believe that you will come out successfully."

She made sure that I lacked nothing, and then went out.

What Braulio had called ore was in reality nothing less than the jaguar's head; and in that tricky way he had got the trophy of our exploit brought into the house. What happened in the dining-room, I learned afterwards. They were just serving the coffee when Juan Ángel came in, and saying that I was coming, told my father what was in the bag. The latter was desirous of getting Don Jerónimo's opinion on the quartz, and told the boy to take it out; Juan was going to do it when he gave a cry of terror, and leaped like a startled deer. It was at once seen what had frightened him. Leaning back against the wall, with staring eyes, he stretched out both hands towards the bag, and cried, "The jaguar!"

"Where?" shouted Don Jerónimo, spilling part of his coffee, and leaping up with more agility than

would have been expected in a man of such a girth. Cárlos and my father also rose. Emma and María drew close to each other.

"In the bag!" replied the questioned Juan.

All breathed again. My father carefully opened the bag, and seeing the head roll out upon the tiles, stepped back. So did Don Jerónimo, and leaning his hands on his knees, he exclaimed, "The monster!"

Cárlos went up to examine the head, and said, "What a fearful fellow!"

"Who killed him?" he asked Juan Ángel, who had become calm again.

"Little master's rifle."

"Did little master's rifle do it all by itself?" asked Don Jerónimo, laughing, and sitting down again.

"No, master, only Braulio told me just now up on the hill that he owed his life to it—"

"Why, where is Efraín, then?" asked my father, in some perturbation, and glancing at María.

"He stayed up by the rocks."

At that point my mother came in. Forgetting that she had just seen me, she cried out, "Oh, my boy!"

"He'll be here immediately," my father said to her.

"Yes, yes, I know it," she replied; "but how did they kill this beast?"

"The ball went here," said Cárlos, leaning down and pointing out the hole in the forehead.

"But is it possible?" asked Don Jerónimo, addressing my father, and going up to the brazier to light his cigar—"is it possible that you let Efraín do such things?"

My father smiled, and answered him complacently, "I told him to-day to get me a bear-skin for the foot of my bed, and it seems he has found it easier to bring me a jaguar-skin."

María had already seen in my mother's eyes enough to reassure her. She started towards the parlor, leading Juan by the hand; the little fellow, still frightened and grasping her skirt, was hindering her in walking. She had to take him up and carry him, and said to him as she went out: "Crying? Oh, shame! A man afraid like that?"

Don Jerónimo heard her, and turning in his chair and puffing out a cloud of smoke, remarked, "The other one will be killing jaguars, too."

"Well, if Efraín has not become a hunter of wild beasts!" said Cárlos to Emma, seating himself at her side. "Why, in college he would not so much as fire a pop-gun at a sparrow. But no, I remember now one holiday when I saw him do some good shooting at Fontibón Lake. Does he hunt often now?"

"He has been several times with José and Braulio," answered my sister, "and has killed some young bears and some fine wolves."

"I was thinking of proposing a deer-hunt for to-

morrow, and for that reason I brought my English rifle along."

"He will be much pleased to gratify you; if you had come yesterday, you could both have gone to the hunt to-day."

"Oh yes, if I had only known."

Just then Mayo, who had been disposing of some savory morsels in the kitchen, came in. He stopped at sight of the head, elevated his neck and back, and cautiously went around in a circle to smell at it; then he rushed out and bounded about the house, afterwards coming back into the dining-room and beginning to howl. It was because he could not find me, and he seemed to feel instinctively that I had been exposed to danger.

My father was much affected by the howling: he was a man who believed in certain prognostics and auguries.

"Mayo, Mayo, what is it?" said he, petting the dog with ill-concealed impatience; "isn't this boy ever coming?"

At that moment I went into the parlor, dressed in a way that would have made it difficult for Lucía and Tránsito to recognize me, unless very near. María was there. We had scarcely time to exchange greetings and smiles. Juan, who was seated on María's lap, said to me as I went on, pointing to the door, "The ugly thing is in there."

I passed in smiling, for I thought the child meant Don Jerónimo. I embraced Cárlos warmly, as he

sprang up to meet me; and for the moment I forgot almost entirely what I had suffered, on his account, in these last days. Señor M—— cordially grasped my hand, saying, "Come, come, how old we must be getting if all these boys are men already."

We soon went into the parlor; María was no longer there. The conversation turned upon the hunt, and I was almost given the lie by Don Jerónimo when I said that our success was due to Braulio: he confronted me with what Juan Ángel had said.

Emma told me how Cárlos had come prepared for a deer-hunt; and he was delighted when I promised him a fine one near the house. As soon as my sister withdrew, Cárlos wanted to show me his English rifle, and for that purpose we went to my room. It was precisely like the one my father had given me on my return from Bogotá, although before I had seen it Cárlos assured me that it was the first of its kind ever brought to the country.

"It's a good one," I said; "you could kill animals like that with this."

"Certainly you could; at sixty yards it doesn't shoot under by a hair."

"Would you make shots of this kind at sixty yards?"

"It would be dangerous to depend on the full range of the gun in such cases; at forty yards it would be a long shot. How far off were you when you shot the jaguar?"

"Thirty feet."

"The deuce you were! I shall have to do something fine in this hunt we're going to have, or else I will not unstrap my gun, and will swear that I have not hunted so much as a humming-bird in all my life."

"Oh, you will see. I will give you a chance to shine, for I will run the deer right down to the garden."

Cárlos asked me a thousand things about our fellow-students, friends, and neighbors at Bogotá; he talked to me of Emigdio, and his new relations with him, and he laughed good-humoredly as he recalled the love of our friend for Micaelina.

Cárlos had returned to Cauca eight months before me; during that time his whiskers had grown, and their black contrasted finely with his smiling cheeks. His mouth was as frank as ever, and his abundant and slightly curling hair shaded a smooth brow. Decidedly he was a good-looking fellow.

"But, old man," he said, standing before my table, "here are a great many books. You have brought the whole book-store. I, also, study—that is, I read; it is all I have time for. I have a fair cousin-graduate who insists that I ingulf myself in a flood of words. You know that serious studies are not my forte; for that reason I did not care to graduate, though I might have done so. I cannot conceal the disgust which politics causes me, and how wearisome to me is all this going to law—although my father laments night and day

that I do not put myself at the front in his suits. He has a perfect passion for litigation, and the most serious questions arise about twenty square yards of marsh or the change in the course of a ditch which has had the good taste to throw a fringe of our land upon the side of a neighbor's. Come," said he, reading the titles of the books—"'Frayssinous,' 'Christ in the Presence of the Age,' the Bible — much religious matter here. 'Don Quixote'—of course; I have never been able to read two chapters."

"Haven't you? Is that so?"

"'Blair,'" he went on, "'Chateaubriand.' My cousin Hortensia has a perfect passion for him. 'English Grammar'—what a hard language! I never could get on with it."

"But you spoke it a little."

"Only the 'how do you do,' like the 'comment ça va-t-il' of French."

"But you have a fine pronunciation."

"So they told me for encouragement."

He went on with his examination: 'Shakespeare,' 'Calderón'—poetry? No? 'Spanish Drama'—more poetry! Confess to me, do you write poetry still? I remember that you wrote some once that saddened me by reminding me of Cauca. Well, do you?"

"No."

"I'm glad of that, for you would end by dying of hunger. 'Cortez,'" he went on, 'The Conquest of Mexico'?"

"No, it is something else."

"'De Tocqueville, Democracy in America'—botheration! 'Segur'—what a lot!"

At this point the bell sounded for supper. Cárlos left off the inventory of my books, hurried to the mirror, combed his whiskers and hair with a pocket-comb, tied his blue cravat with the skill of a modiste; and we went out.

XXII.

Cárlos and I passed into the dining-room. The seats were arranged as follows: my father was at the head of the table; at his left my mother had just sat down; on his right was Don Jerónimo, who unfolded his napkin without breaking off the wearisome history of his lawsuit with Don Ignacio over their boundary line; next to my mother was one vacant chair, and another was alongside Señor M——; next to these Emma and María were seated, on opposite sides of the table, and beyond them were the children.

It rested with me to tell Cárlos which one of the empty seats he was to take. As I was about to do it, María, without looking at me, rested her hand on the chair next her—a customary signal of hers to make me understand, without letting the rest perceive it, that I could be near her. Perhaps she doubted if she was understood, for she let her eyes

rest upon me for an instant—and with their language, at such times, I was well acquainted. Nevertheless, I offered Cárlos the seat she was indicating for me, and sat down myself next Emma.

For a wonder, Don Jerónimo got to the end of the last affidavit presented to the Court the day before, and turning to me, said: "Well, it must have been hard for you two to break off your talk. I suppose it was about everything—pleasant memories of the past, your acquaintances in Bogotá, plans for the future—I understand it all. There's nothing like seeing a favorite school-fellow again. I really forgot how much you wanted to see each other. But do not blame Cárlos for the delay; he even wanted to come alone."

I told Don Jerónimo that I could scarcely forgive him for having kept me waiting so long for the pleasure of seeing Cárlos; but that I could do so more easily if they would make a long visit now. To this he replied, with his mouth not quite so unoccupied as would have been desirable, and looking at me obliquely as he sipped his chocolate, "That will be difficult to arrange, because we begin salting the cattle to-morrow."

After a short pause, during which my father smiled slightly, he went on, "It cannot be helped, for if I am not there, he will have to be."

"We have a great deal to attend to," remarked Cárlos, with a certain air as of a man of business.

María avoided looking at me; perhaps she was

offended with me. She was more beautiful than ever, although somewhat pale. Her dress was of black gauze figured with small blue grapes, and its skirt, falling from the belt in many folds, rustled as she walked, like the night-breeze in the rose-bushes at my window. A transparent scarf, of the same color as her dress, covered her bosom, seemingly not daring to touch her throat, white as a lily. From her neck a cross set with diamonds hung glittering on its black cord. Her hair, arranged in two braids of many strands, half hid her temples, and fell down over her shoulders like waves.

When the cloth was removed, the customary prayer was said. My mother invited us into the parlor, but Don Jerónimo remained with my father to talk over their farming.

My sister brought the guitar to Cárlos, as she knew that he played it very well. After some urging he consented to play. While he was tuning the instrument he asked Emma and Maria if they were fond of dancing; and as he looked particularly at the latter, she replied that she never had danced. He turned to me, saying, "Why, is it possible?"

"What?" said I; I had just come back from my room.

"That you have never taught your sister and cousin how to dance. I didn't think you so selfish. Or did Matilde teach you on condition that you should not spread abroad her secrets?"

"She relied upon you to make Cauca a paradise of dancers," I answered.

"Upon me? You force me to confess to the young ladies that I should have become more skilful if you had not always taken your lesson at the same time that I did."

The guitar was now tuned, and Cárlos played a contra-dance which he and I had reasons for remembering.

"What does that remind you of?" he asked, standing the guitar upright on his knees.

"Of many things, though nothing in particular."

"Nothing? Not that funny time we had in the house of Señora ——?"

"Ah yes, now I remember."

"We were trying," he explained, "to prevent our scrupulous instructress from being disappointed; you were going to dance with her, and I—"

"The question was which couple of us was to perform the contra-dance."

"And you must admit that I was victorious," said Cárlos, laughing, "for I gave up the place to you."

"You simply did not oblige me to insist upon it. Now do us the favor to sing."

While this dialogue was going on, María, who was seated with my sister upon the sofa opposite to Cárlos and me, fixed her gaze upon him for a moment, to observe closely what was evident to her alone—that I was vexed; then she pretended to oc-

cupy herself in knotting together the loose ends of her braids.

My mother urged Cárlos to sing. He struck up, in a full, clear voice, a song much in vogue in those days, of which the first lines were these:

> "The trumpet gave its hoarse and warlike cry,
> Calling to dubious and bloody strife;
> And, 'mid the roar of marching soldiery,
> The hero changed for camps his happy life."

As soon as Cárlos finished, he besought my sister and María to sing also. The latter appeared not to comprehend what was going on. Emma was willing to sing; she drew near to María, saying, "Shall we sing?"

"But what can I sing?"

I went up to María, and said to her, in a low voice, "Isn't there anything you like to sing, anything?"

She looked at me then in the way she always did when I spoke to her in that tone; and a smile played on her lips for an instant, like that of a pretty child wakened by her mother's kiss.

"Yes," she replied, "'The Fairies.'"

I had written the verses of that song. Emma had found them in my desk, and had adapted to them the music of a popular selection.

On one of those summer nights when the winds seem to invite to silence so as to listen to the vague hum and distant echoes; when the moon delays or

does not appear at all, fearing that her light may be intrusive; when the soul is like an adored mistress who leaves us for a few moments, goes away from us little by little, smiling, only to return more loving than ever—on such a night María, Emma, and I were in the corridor towards the valley, and after Emma had struck a few melancholy chords on the guitar, they began to sing together with voices uncultivated but virginal, like the nature which was the subject of their song. I was surprised, and my bad verses seemed to me fine and expressive. Ah, they still seem to preserve, as it were, an aroma of María; as if they were moist with her tears. Here they are:

"I dreamed of wandering through groves of palms,
Whose polished leafage, pendent, drooping low,
Struck by the sun, now sinking o'er far hills,
In splendor shone, and flamed with ruby glow.
The blue and limpid surface of the lake,
Upon its tranquil front took tints of rose,
And on the shores, where willows spread their shoots,
I saw the herons fixed in shadowy pose.
The eve was hushed, and waited for the night,
Silent, to put her vaporous mantle on;
And from the frothy sea where she had slept
The moon looked forth to see if day were gone.
Now come and walk with me beneath the trees,
Where gracious fairies will attune my lute:
I learn from them that your dream is like mine—
That deathless life shall be our dear love's fruit."

My father and Señor M—— entered the parlor just as the song came to an end. The former, who

could only, in his most cheerful moments, hum some national air, was yet very fond of music. Don Jerónimo bestowed himself as comfortably as possible on a yielding sofa, and yawned twice in succession.

"I had never heard that music with those words," Cárlos remarked to my sister.

"She read them in a newspaper," I hastily put in. "It's wretched stuff," I added. "The newspapers publish so many atrocities of that kind! The verses are by a poet of Havana, and you know that in Cuba nature is very much like what it is in Cauca."

María, my mother, and my sister looked at each other in surprise at the cool way in which I deceived Cárlos; but they knew nothing of the examination of my books made by him in the afternoon, or of the slight respect he had shown my favorite authors. I recalled with a sort of spite what he had said about Quixote, and continued: "You must have seen that poem in *The Day*, and have forgotten it. I think it was signed Almendárez."

"It's very likely so," he said; "I have such a poor memory. If they are the verses I have heard my cousin recite, I must say they please me better as sung by the young ladies. Won't you have the goodness to repeat them?" he added, addressing María.

She smiled, and asked Emma: "How does the first stanza begin? I'm afraid I've forgotten them. You recite them, you know them so well."

"But you have just sung them," remarked Cárlos,

"and it must be easier to recite them. Bad as they may be, they would seem excellent in your mouth."

María repeated them, though when she came to the last couplet her voice was rather tremulous.

Cárlos thanked her, and added, "Now I am almost sure I have heard them before."

Come, said I to myself; what Cárlos is certain of is having seen all his life what these verses describe, but without reflecting on it.

XXIII.

Bedtime came, and I sought my room, hoping that a bed had not been placed there for Cárlos, too. My mother and María were just coming out.

"I can sleep here alone, can't I?" I asked the former.

She understood the reason of my question, and replied, "No, your friend."

"Ah yes, the flowers," said I, seeing María carrying in a handkerchief the ones she had put in my vase that morning; "where are you taking them?"

"To the oratory; for, as there has not been time to arrange others there—"

I was extremely grateful to her for her delicacy in not allowing the flowers she had destined for me to remain for the enjoyment of another. But she had left the cluster of lilies which I had brought from the mountains that afternoon, although it was

in plain sight upon the table. Observing that, I gave them to her, saying: "Carry these lilies also to the altar; Tránsito sent them to you by me, asking me to tell you that she had chosen you for a bridesmaid. And, as we all ought to pray for her happiness—"

"Yes, yes," she answered; then she turned to my mother, and added, "So she wants me to be her bridesmaid."

"Nothing more natural," was the reply.

"Oh, I have a beautiful dress for the occasion! You must tell her that I am very happy that she has chosen us—has chosen me as her bridesmaid."

My brothers, Felipe and the next younger, were surprised and delighted to learn that I was to sleep in their room. They slept together so that I might have Felipe's bed; in its curtains María had hung the medallion of the Mater Dolorosa which used to be on the hangings of my own bed.

As soon as the boys had repeated their prayers, kneeling down by the bed, they said good-night, and fell asleep after laughing at the fear they were both thrown into by the jaguar's head.

That night the image of María was not the only thing with me; the pets of the house slept near my bed; at sunrise she would come to get them, would give them a morning kiss, and take them to the fountain, where she would wash their faces with hands as white and fragrant as the Castile roses which they used to pick for the altar and for her.

XXIV.

I WAS awakened in the morning by the whispering of the children, who in vain tried to respect my sleep. The doves which had been recently caught, and, with clipped wings, kept in empty boxes, cooed as they caught sight of the first rays of light penetrating through the cracks of their prison.

"Don't open the door," said Felipe; "don't open it, for brother is asleep, and—"

"But María has already called us," replied the little fellow.

"No, she hasn't; I've been awake a good while, and she hasn't called."

"Yes, she has. I know what you want—to run down to the ravine ahead of me and then say that all the blackfish are on your hooks."

"Well, as I had all the work of setting them properly—" Felipe broke in.

"What talk! Why, it is Juan Ángel who sets them for you in the good places."

He persisted in opening the door.

"Don't open it," said Felipe, somewhat put out. "Wait and I'll see if Efraín is asleep."

Saying this, he came on tiptoe towards my bed. I seized him by the arm, and said, "So, you rascal, you take away his fish, do you?"

Both laughed, and came forward to make their defence. All was settled by my promise to go out in the afternoon and witness the setting of the hooks. I rose, and leaving them busy in shutting up the doves, which were flying about and trying to get out under the door, crossed the garden. The orange-blossoms, sweet basil, and roses were giving to the breeze their most delicate odors, as they received the caress of the first rays of the sun, now appearing above the crest of Morrillos, and touching with rose and gold the light clouds far up by the zenith.

Don Jerónimo and Cárlos were walking in the corridor by their rooms, and talking together, when I leaped over the garden wall so as to reach the outer court.

"Aha!" said Señor M——, "you're up early, like a good farmer. I imagined you were a sleepy-head like your friend here when he came from Bogotá; but any one living with me has to become an early riser, I assure you."

He went on to give a long list of the advantages which arise from not sleeping much; to all which it might have been replied that what he called sleeping but little was in reality sleeping a great deal, beginning early, for he confessed that he was in the habit of going to bed at seven or eight, so as to avoid nervousness. The arrival of Braulio, whom Juan Ángel had gone to summon at daybreak, in accordance with my directions, prevented us from enjoying the peroration of Señor M——'s discourse.

Braulio had a pair of dogs with him, which one who knew them less well than I would have had difficulty in recognizing as the heroes of the hunt of the day before. Mayo growled at sight of them, and came to hide himself behind me with signs of invincible dislike; he, with his white and still handsome hair, his drooping ears, and his stern frown, had an inexpressibly aristocratic air, compared with the mountaineer's hunting-dogs. Braulio gave me a respectful greeting, and came up to ask after the family; I grasped his hand affectionately. His dogs fawned upon me, to show that they liked me better than Mayo.

"You will have a chance to show your shooting," said I to Cárlos. "I have sent to get two good dogs from Santa Elena, and here is a companion with whom the deer had better not try any tricks, and his pups are very clever."

"What, those?" asked Cárlos, disdainfully.

"With such mangy curs!" added Don Jerónimo.

"Yes, sir, with those identical dogs."

"I'll not believe it, even if I see it," answered Señor M——, resuming his walk along the corridor.

They had just brought us coffee, and I made Braulio take the cup meant for me. Cárlos and his father did not conceal their surprise at my courtesy towards the mountaineer.

Shortly afterwards, Señor M—— and my father rode away to inspect the farm-work. Braulio, Cárlos,

and I devoted ourselves to getting the rifles ready, and to gauging the load according to my friend's ideas. We were busy with this when my mother sent word that she wanted to speak to me. She was waiting for me in her sewing-room. María and my sister had gone to the bath. Asking me to sit down, she said: "Your father insists that María ought to know of Cárlos's proposal. Do you think so, too?"

"I think that whatever my father desires should be done."

"I imagine you say that to prove yourself obedient, and not because his decision does not trouble you."

"I have agreed to do what he wishes; besides, María is not yet engaged to me, and is at perfect liberty to decide according to her own judgment. I promised to say nothing to her of what we determined upon, and I have kept my promise."

"I am afraid that if María supposes that your father and I do not approve your engagement, she will be much affected and perhaps made sick. Your father has not thought it best to speak to Señor M—— about María's disease, for fear he might think it a mere pretext for declining his offer; and as both he and his son know that she has a dowry —well, I cannot explain it, but you understand. What must we do, then, do you think, to prevent María from imagining even for an instant that we do not want her to be your wife—without, at the

same time, going contrary to what your father has just said?"

"There is only one way."

"What is it?"

"I will tell you, and I am sure you will approve; I beg you to approve. Let us tell María of the secrecy which my father has enjoined upon me in regard to his consent that I should look upon her as the one who is to be my wife. I promise you to be very careful and to do nothing to make my father suspect this necessary disregard of his wishes. Can I go on acting as he commands without doing María more harm than would come from confessing everything to her? Trust in me. Isn't it true that it is impossible to do as my father desires? Don't you see it, and think so, too?"

My mother remained silent for a few moments, and then, smiling in the most affectionate manner, she said:

"Very well; but you ought not to promise what you cannot perform. And how shall I tell her of Cárlos's proposal?"

"Just as you would tell Emma, under similar circumstances; and afterwards you can tell her what you have promised. If I am not mistaken, your first words will give her pain, since she will fear that you and my father are strongly opposed to our marriage. She overheard what you said, once, about her disease, and only your kind treatment, and the conversation she and I had yesterday, have sufficed

to reassure her. Forget all about me when you tell her about Cárlos's offer. I shall listen to what you say, behind this door."

"You will?" asked she, astonished.

"Yes, Señora, I will."

"And why do you resort to such a plot?"

"María will be glad I did it, after it is all over."

"What do you think will come of it, then?"

"I shall know how much she is capable of doing for me."

"But will it not be better, if what you wish is to hear what she says to me, that she should never know that you heard it, and that I consented to your hearing it?"

"Let it be so, if you wish."

"Ah, you don't like to concede that."

"I beseech you not to oppose it."

"But do you not see that to do what you ask, if she comes to know it, is for me to promise her a thing which, unfortunately, I do not know whether I can grant; since, if her sickness were to return, your father would oppose your marrying her, as I also should have to?"

"She knows that. She will never consent to be my wife if this disease reappears. But have you forgotten what the doctor said?"

"Have it as you wish, then."

"Listen! there's her voice. Here they come. Don't let Emma go through this door."

María entered, still smiling over what she and

Emma had been talking about. With light and almost childish step she crossed my mother's room, and did not perceive the latter until just as she was opening her own door.

"Ah, were you there?" she exclaimed; then coming nearer, she said: "But how pale you are! You have a headache, haven't you?"

"No, no; I am well. But I was waiting for you, to speak to you alone. It is a serious matter, too, and I am afraid it will pain you."

María fixed a brilliant gaze upon my mother, and paling slightly, asked her: "What can it be? What is it?"

"Sit down here," said my mother, pointing to a stool at her feet.

She sat down, vainly trying to smile, and her face took on an enchanting expression of gravity.

"I am going to speak to you just as I would to Emma, in a like situation."

"Yes, Señora, I am listening."

"Your father has charged me to tell you that Señor M—— has asked your hand for his son Cárlos."

"My hand?" she exclaimed, in amazement, involuntarily rising to her feet. But she at once resumed her seat, covering her face with her hands; and I heard her sob.

"What must I tell him, María?"

"He charged you to tell me?" she asked, in broken tones.

"Yes, daughter; and it was his duty to let you know this."

"But why are you the one to tell me?"

"What would you have me do?"

"Ah, tell him that I cannot—that I am not able—that—no."

After an instant's pause, she lifted her head to look at my mother, who could not help weeping with her, and said:

"Do they all know it? Did they all want you to tell me?"

"Yes, they all know it but Emma."

"Only she! Heavens!" She hid her face on her arms, which were resting on my mother's knees, and remained in that position several minutes. Then lifting her pale face, bedewed with tears, she said: "Very well. You have done your duty. I know it all now—"

"But, María," tenderly interrupted my mother, "is it, then, such a misfortune that Cárlos should wish to be your husband? Is he not—"

"I beg of you—I do not wish—I do not need to know more. So they have let you propose it to me! All, all of them have favored it! Then I say," she went on, in a voice full of energy, in spite of her sobs—"I say that I will die sooner than consent to this. Ah, this gentleman does not know, does he, that I have the same disease my mother died of, when she was still very young? Alas! what shall I do now without her?"

"And am I not here? Do not I love you with all my soul?"

My mother was not so strong as she thought.

Down my cheeks rolled tears. I felt them as they dropped upon my hands resting on the knob of the door which hid me.

María answered my mother, "But why, then, do you propose this to me?"

"Because it was necessary that this *no* should be spoken by you, even though I supposed you would speak it."

"And you are the only one who supposed I would?"

"Perhaps another supposed so, too. If you knew how much sorrow, how many sleepless nights, this thing has caused the one you think most blameworthy—"

"You mean papa?" said María, already less pale.

"No; Efraín."

María gave a faint cry, and letting her head fall on my mother's lap, remained motionless. The latter was just opening her lips to call me, when María slowly rose, and said, almost smiling, as she fastened up her hair with trembling hands: "I was wrong to cry so, wasn't I? I thought—"

"Calm yourself, and dry those tears. I want to see you again as happy as when you came in. You must appreciate the generosity of his conduct—"

"Yes, Señora. He must not see that I have been

crying, must he?" She caught up my mother's handkerchief to wipe her eyes.

"Did not Efraín do right to consent to have me tell you all?"

"Perhaps so—why, of course."

"But you say that as if—your papa imposed the condition upon him, thought it was necessary that he should leave you entirely free in this matter."

"The condition? Condition of what?"

"He made him promise never to tell you that we knew and approved the relations between you."

María's cheeks became crimson at hearing this; dotted as they still were with tears, they were precisely like those fresh roses moist with dew which she picked for me mornings. Her eyes were fastened to the floor.

"Why did he make him promise that?" said she, finally, in a tone which I could scarcely hear. "Was I to blame? Am I doing wrong, then?"

"No, daughter; but your papa thought that precaution was necessary on account of your disease—"

"Precaution? Am I not well now? Don't they think I shall not be sick any more? And how could Efraín be the cause of my sickness?"

"It would be impossible, seeing that he loves you so much, perhaps more than you love him."

"What ought I to do? I will do whatever they wish."

"Cárlos will speak to you to-day of his hopes."

"To me?"

"Yes; listen: you will say to him, remaining as calm as possible, of course, that you cannot accept his offer, although it is a great honor to you, because you are very young, letting him understand that your refusal gives you real pain—"

"But this will be when we are all together?"

"Yes," answered my mother, delighted with the frankness revealed in her voice and glance; "I think I deserve to be treated very kindly by you."

She made no reply to this. She put her arm about my mother's neck, and remained in that position a few minutes, her face wearing an expression of the greatest tenderness. Then she swiftly crossed the room, and disappeared behind the curtains in the door of her own room.

XXV.

My mother was told of our plan of hunting, and had an early breakfast served for Cárlos, Braulio, and me. It was all I could do to persuade the mountaineer to sit down at the table; he placed himself at the farthest remove from Cárlos and me.

Naturally, we talked about the hunt. Cárlos said: "Braulio maintains that my load is perfectly graduated; but he insists that my rifle is not as good as yours, though they are of the same make, and he himself fired with mine at a citron and put four

slugs in it. Isn't that so, my good fellow?" he concluded, addressing the mountaineer.

"I will wager," replied he, "that the master can kill a *pellar* at seventy yards with that rifle."

"Then we'll see if I can't kill a deer. How have you arranged the hunt?" he added, turning to me.

"The way we always do when we want to end the work near the house; Braulio is to go up to the foot of the land-slide with his lively dogs; Juan Ángel is to stay in the ravine with two of the four dogs which I have ordered from Santa Elena; your servant with the other two will wait by the bank of the river, to prevent the game from getting away to the Novillera; you and I will be ready to go to the point where the deer comes out."

Braulio thought the plan a good one, and after helping Juan Ángel saddle our horses, went away with him to take his part in the hunt. My black horse stamped impatiently on the pavement, anxious to display his powers; he arched his neck, delicate and lustrous as black satin, and snorted as he shook his wavy mane. Cárlos was mounted on a roan Quito horse which General Flores had recently sent as a present to my father.

Mayo went with us as far as the first stream we had to ford; there he paused as if to meditate, and then went galloping straight back to the house.

"Listen!" said I to Cárlos, after a half-hour had passed; "listen!"

The shouts of Braulio and the baying of the dogs

proved that they had started a deer. The mountains re-echoed; if the barking died out for short intervals, it was only to be renewed with greater fury and at a less distance.

A little later, Braulio came down by the unwooded side of the cañon. As soon as he reached Juan Ángel he loosened the two dogs from the leash, and held them for a few minutes, grasping them by the nape of the neck, until he was sure that the game was near the pass where we were; then he shouted at them encouragingly, and they disappeared like a flash.

Cárlos, Juan Ángel, and I spread out over the slope. Soon we saw the deer, hard pushed by one of José's dogs, coming down the cañon. Juan Ángel showed the whites of his eyes, and his broad laugh revealed every one of his fine teeth. Although I had ordered him to stay in the cañon, for fear the deer might go back into it, he crossed with Braulio the marsh-land and sandy stretches between us and the river. As the deer struck the bank of the stream, the dogs lost the scent, and he wheeled and went up instead of down.

Cárlos and I dismounted, so as to aid Braulio. After losing more than an hour in running here and there, we heard at last the baying of a dog, which gave us hope that the track had been found again. But Cárlos, as he floundered out of a swamp into which he had plunged, he knew not how or when, vowed that his stupid negro had let the game get

down the river. Braulio, of whom we had lost sight for a short time, now shouted with such a powerful voice that we could hear him notwithstanding his great distance away: "There he goes! There he goes! Leave one with a rifle where you are. Come out into the open. The deer is going back to the ravine."

Cárlos's servant was left where he was, and we two rushed to mount our horses. Just then the game emerged from the ravine, at a great distance from the dogs, and began to go down towards the house.

"Jump off!" I shouted to Cárlos, "and wait for him as he comes round."

He did so, and as the deer, already exhausted, made an effort to leap over the garden wall, fired at him. The deer kept on. Cárlos stood still in amazement. Braulio now came up, and I leaped from my horse, throwing the reins to Juan Ángel.

From the house they could see all that had taken place. Don Jerónimo sallied out, rifle in hand, sprang over the railing of the corridor, and just as he was going to shoot at the animal, luckily caught his feet in the plants of a flower-bed, and fell, while my father was saying to him, "Be careful, be careful, they are all coming right there."

Braulio followed close on the deer, keeping off the dogs. The frightened and trembling animal ran into the corridor, and lay down almost breathless under one of the sofas; Braulio was dragging

him out when I came up with Cárlos. The hunt had been amusing to me; but he was vainly trying to hide the mortification he felt at having missed so easy a shot.

Emma and María came out timidly to touch the young buck, begging not to have him killed. He seemed to understand that they were interceding for him, as he looked at them with swimming and frightened eyes, moaning softly. It was resolved to spare his life, and Braulio set about tethering him in a convenient place. When all was over, Mayo went up to the prisoner, and sniffed at him from a safe distance; then he went back and lay down, leaning his head upon his paws, in the greatest tranquillity.

A little later, as I was saying good-bye to Braulio, who was about to return to the mountain, he said to me: "Your friend is raging, and I am the cause of it. I wanted to be avenged for his ridicule of my dogs this morning."

I asked him to explain what he meant.

"I thought," Braulio went on, "that you would give him the best shot, and so I did not put a bullet in his rifle when he gave it to me to load."

"You did very wrong," I remarked.

"I won't do it again; anyhow, not with him, for I don't think he will want to hunt with us again. Ah, Señorita María has given me a thousand good wishes for Tránsito. I am so grateful that she is willing to be our bridesmaid. I do not know what

to do to make her understand—you will have to tell her."

"I will; don't you trouble yourself about that."

"Good-bye," said he, frankly, taking my hand, though he did not fail to touch the brim of his hat at the same time; "good-bye till Sunday."

He went out of the court-yard, calling his dogs with the sharp whistle which he made by pressing his lower lip between his thumb and forefinger.

XXVI.

Up to that time, I had succeeded in preventing Cárlos from taking me into his confidence about the proposal which, in an evil hour for him, had brought him to our house. But as soon as we were alone in my room, where he took me under the pretext of desiring to rest and read, I saw that he was going to put me in the difficult situation which I had been so much dreading, and from which up to that time I had escaped only by shrewd management. He stretched himself on my bed, complaining of the heat; and when I said I would have some fruit brought, he remarked that fruit did not agree with him since he had had the malarial fever. Then I went up to my shelves, asking him what he wanted to read.

"Oh, don't let's read anything," he replied.

"Would you like to go and bathe in the river?"

"The sun has given me a headache."

I offered him an alkali to relieve it.

"No, no," he replied, refusing it, "it will go away."

Then he struck his boots with the whip he held in his hand, and said: "I swear I'll never hunt again. *Caramba!* to miss a shot like that!"

"Oh, everybody does sometimes."

"Everybody? I'm the only one who ever missed a deer at that distance."

After a moment's silence, he said, looking about the room as if in search of something: "What have they done with the flowers which were here yesterday? They did not bring them back to-day."

"If I had known that it would please you to see them here, I would have had them brought. You were not fond of flowers in Bogotá."

I began turning over the leaves of a book which was lying open on the table.

"I never was," replied Cárlos; "but—don't read, old fellow! Listen—sit down here by me, for I have something very interesting to tell you. Shut the door."

There was no escape for me. I made an effort to command my features in the best way I could, resolved to conceal from Cárlos, at all hazards, the immense stupidity of taking me into his confidence. But his father just then came to the door, and saved me from the torture which I was expecting.

"Cárlos," said Don Jerónimo, from the outside, "we need you out here."

There was something in his tone that seemed to signify, "The affair is already far advanced."

Cárlos imagined that things were going on gloriously. At a bound he was on his feet, replying, "I will be there immediately;" then he went out.

If I had not then been pretending to read with the utmost indifference, he would probably have come up to me and said, smilingly, "In view of the surprise I am going to give you, you must pardon me for not having told you anything about it—" But I must have seemed to him as unconcerned at what was going on as I pretended to be; and that was a great gain.

From the footsteps of the two, I perceived that they were going into my father's room.

Not desiring to expose myself again to the danger of having Cárlos speak to me of his affairs, I went towards my mother's apartments. María was in the sewing-room; from her chair fell the foamy skirt of her white muslin, here and there caught up with loops of blue ribbon; her hair, not yet braided, hung in curls round her shoulders. On the rug at her feet, Juan had gone to sleep, surrounded by his toys. She was lightly turning her head backward, as if to watch the child; the piece of lawn which she was sewing had fallen from her hands to the rug.

As soon as she heard steps, she lifted her eyes,

brushed her hand across her temples to put back the hair that was not there, and, blushing, leaned forward hastily to pick up her sewing.

"Where is my mother?" I asked her, leaving off looking at her to admire the beauty of the sleeping boy.

"In papa's room."

Finding in my face what she timidly looked for, her lips began to smile as she said this. I kneeled down and wiped the forehead of the little fellow with my handkerchief.

"Oh, dear," said María, "I did not realize that he had gone to sleep. I must put him to bed."

She went out with Juan, but returned after a few moments and resumed her seat; I had placed my own near it. She was arranging the things in her work-box, which Juan had disordered, when I said to her, "Have you talked with my mother to-day about a certain proposition of Cárlos's?"

"Yes," she replied, without looking at me, and prolonging her occupation with the box.

"What did she say to you? Leave that now, and let us talk seriously."

She still looked for something on the floor, and at last, assuming an air of affected gravity, though she could not hide the vivid blush on her cheeks or the brilliance of her eyes, she answered, "Many things."

"What things?"

"Those which you agreed she should tell me."

"Tell me what my mother said to you."

"She did not give me permission to repeat them; but what I answered her, that certainly I can tell."

"Very well, what was it?"

"I told her—no, I can't tell that either."

"But you will tell me some time, won't you?"

"Yes; but not to-day."

"My mother has informed me that you are minded to answer him as you ought, so that he will understand that you fittingly appreciate the honor he does you."

She looked steadily at me then, without replying.

"That is the way it should be," I went on.

She lowered her eyes and continued silent, absorbed, apparently, in arranging the needles in order upon her needle-cushion.

"María, didn't you hear me?" I added.

"Yes."

Again she met my eyes, which I could not take from her face. Then I saw tears glistening on her lashes.

"Why, what are you crying for?" I asked.

"I am not crying. Why, did I cry?"

She took my handkerchief and hastily wiped her eyes.

"They have caused you suffering with this, haven't they? If it makes you sad, do not let us talk of it."

"Oh no; let us talk."

"Is it a great trial to you to make up your mind

to listen to what Cárlos is going to say to you to-day?"

"I must try to please mamma. But she promised me that I should not be alone. You will be there, won't you?"

"Why should I? How could he speak to you?"

"Well, you must be as near as possible."

She stood in a listening attitude.

"Mamma is coming," she continued, putting her hand in mine, and allowing me to press it to my lips—a favor she was accustomed to grant me at parting when she wished to make my happiness complete. My mother came in, and María, on the point of going, said to me, "The bath?"

"Yes," I replied.

"And the orangeade when you are there?"

"Yes."

My eyes must have put as much tenderness into these replies as my heart desired to do, for she, pleased with my feigning, smiled at my answers.

XXVII.

That afternoon, before the ladies went out to make coffee, as they always did when there were guests in the house, I turned the conversation to the boys' fishing, and told why I had promised to witness the baiting of the hooks that day in the ravine. My proposal to choose that direction for a walk

was accepted. Only María looked at me as if to say, "Can't it be helped, then?"

We were crossing the garden. It had been necessary to wait for María, and also for my sister, who had gone to find the reason for María's delay. I gave my arm to my mother. Emma politely declined that of Cárlos, under pretext of having to lead one of the children; but María accepted it, almost trembling, and as she placed her hand upon it she turned to look for me; I could only signify to her that she must not hesitate.

We had reached that point on the shore where, in the hollow of the meadow, carpeted with fine grass, here and there black rocks thrust themselves up spotted with white moss.

Cárlos's voice dropped into a confidential tone; till then he had undoubtedly been rallying his courage, and now began to draw off to one side so as to get a good opportunity to speak. María tried to draw back again; in her glance at my mother and at me there was almost a prayer; my only resource was not to look at her. She must have seen in my face something which revealed to her the torment I was enduring, since I saw in her countenance, pale as it was, a frown of determination wholly unusual in her. From Cárlos's appearance, I was sure that the moment had come when I wished to hear what was said. She began to speak, and as her voice, though tremulous, was more distinct than he seemed to desire, my ears caught these broken phrases:

"It would have been better if you had spoken only to them— I deeply appreciate the honor which you— This refusal—"

Cárlos was confused. María had released his arm, and when she finished speaking, began to play with Juan's curls. The boy had laid hold of her skirt and was pointing out to her a bunch of *adorotes* hanging from a neighboring tree.

I doubt if the scene, which I have described as exactly as I could, was taken at its true significance by Don Jerónimo, who, with his hands in the pockets of his blue jacket, came up just then with my father. For the latter, it was as if he had heard everything.

María joined herself dexterously to our group, starting to help Juan pick some mulberries which he could not reach. After I had gathered the fruit to give to the child, she said to me, as she took it, "What can I do, not to go back with him?"

"Nothing," I replied.

But I went up to Cárlos and asked him to go down with me a little farther through the meadow to see a beautiful pool; and I proposed, with as much naturalness as it was possible for me to assume, that we should come to bathe in it the next morning. It was a picturesque spot, but decidedly Cárlos saw little of the beauty of the trees and the flowering canes which dipped themselves in the foam of the water, like garlands torn off by the wind.

As the sun went down, it tinted the hills, the

woods, and the streams with a glowing topaz color, with that mild and mysterious light which the country people call the "deer's sun," doubtless because at such a time the inhabitants of the thick forests come out to feed on the coarse grass of the high ridges, or at the foot of the magueys growing in the crevices of the rocks.

As Cárlos and I fell in with the group formed by the others, already on their way to the house, my father said to Don Jerónimo, with a perfectly plain intention, "We must not be taken after this for valetudinarians; let us go back as escorts."

This said, he took María's hand and put it on his arm, leaving Señor M—— to accompany my mother and Emma.

"They have been more gallant than we," I said to Cárlos, pointing to my father and his.

We followed them. I carried Juan as he had come up to me with outstretched arms, saying, "Take me, for the path is thorny, and I am tired."

María told me afterwards that my father had asked her, when they began to go over the slope of the meadow, what she had said to Cárlos; and as he pleasantly insisted that she should tell him, she succeeded at last in obeying him.

"That is to say," asked my father, almost laughing, after listening to her hesitating story—"that is to say, you never wish to marry?"

She replied by shaking her head in sign of denial, though she did not dare to look at him.

"My daughter," continued my father, "can it be that you are pledged to another? That isn't so, is it?"

"Yes, it is so," replied María, in a great fright.

"Is he better than this fine fellow you have refused?" As he said this, my father put his free hand on her forehead, to make her look at him.

"Do you know that you are very beautiful?"

"I? No, Señor."

"Yes, you are; and some one must have told you so a great many times. Tell me who is the favored one."

María trembled, without daring to say a word more, but my father continued: "He will become worthy of you at last; you want him to be a man of standing — come, confess it to me. Hasn't he told you that he has acknowledged everything to me?"

"But if there is nothing to tell?"

"What! are you going to have secrets from your papa?" He said this in a tone of complaint, yet looking at her affectionately. María gathered courage to say, "Well, haven't you said that he has told you everything?"

My father kept silent for a moment. It seemed as if some memory was saddening him. As they were going up the stairs of the garden corridor she heard him say, "Poor Salomón!"

At the same time he stroked the hair of his friend's daughter.

My father exerted himself to the utmost to make the position of Señor M—— and his son as little painful as possible, but all was in vain. Don Jerónimo having already said that he would set off early the next morning, reasserted that he must be at his farm very early, and went to bed with Cárlos at nine o'clock, after taking leave of the family in the parlor.

I went with my friend to his room. All my affection for him had revived in these last hours of his stay; his high-bred character, of which he had given me so many proofs in the course of our student life, resumed its power over me. The reserve which I had felt myself forced to maintain towards him seemed to me almost hateful. If, when I learned of his intentions, I said to myself, I had confided to him my love for María, and all that she had become to me in those three months, he would have desisted from his purpose, and I, less ambiguous and more loyal, would have had nothing to be ashamed of.

As soon as we were alone in my room he said to me, putting on the old frank air, although the disappointment he had suffered did not entirely disappear from his face:

"I must get you to forgive me for a lack of confidence in your friendship."

"What lack?" I responded. "I have noticed none."

"You haven't noticed any?"

"No."

"Don't you know why I and my father came here?"

"Yes."

"Have you learned the result of my proposal?"

"Not altogether, but—"

"But you guess it."

"I do."

"Very well; then, why did I not speak with you about my intentions before any one else—before my father, even?"

"An extreme delicacy on your part—"

"Nothing of the kind. It was pure stupidity, lack of foresight, forgetfulness of—of whatever you please; that is not called by the name you have used."

He walked up and down the room; then he paused before my chair, and said: "Listen, and admire my innocence. *Cáspita!* what on earth is the use of having lived twenty-four years? It is a little more than a year since I left you to come to Cauca, and would that I had waited for you as you wished! As soon as I got home I received the most polite attentions from your father and all your family. They saw in me your friend, probably because you had told them what good friends we were. Before you came I saw the Señorita María and your sister two or three times, at our house and here. About a month ago my father told me that it would give him great pleasure if I were to marry one of them. Your cousin had already destroyed in me, though

she did not know it, all those memories of Bogotá which were such a torture to me, as I told you in my first letters. I agreed with my father that he should ask the Señorita María's hand for me. Why did I not see you first? It is true I was kept in the city by my mother's long illness, but why did I not write to you? Do you know why? It was because I thought that to tell you of my intentions would be like asking you to favor them, and pride kept me from doing it. I forgot that you were my friend; you would have the right, you have it, to forget it also. But if your cousin had loved me; if what was only the regard shown me as a friend of yours had been really love, you would have consented to her being my wife without— What a fool I am to ask you! And you are sensible not to answer."

"See here," he added, after leaning his elbows on the window-sill for a moment, "you know that I am not one of the men who die for these things; you remember how I always used to laugh at your faith in the great passions of those French dramas with which you used to read me to sleep winter nights. This is a different thing; I must needs get myself married, and I flattered myself that I should enter your family almost as your brother. It has not turned out that way; but I shall search for a woman who will love me without making me deserving of your hate, and—"

"My hate!" I exclaimed, interrupting him.

"Yes; excuse my frankness. What a silly thing

—rather, what a reckless thing it would have been for me to have placed myself in such a situation! A fine result it would have been: sorrow for your family, remorse for me, and the loss of your friendship.

"You must love her very much," he proceeded, after a pause, "for a few hours have been enough for me to see it, in spite of your trying to conceal it. Isn't it true that you love her as you thought you might come to love when you were eighteen?"

"I do," replied I, overcome by his noble candor.

"And your father doesn't know it?"

"He knows it."

"He does!"

Then I told him of the talk I had had with my father some days before.

"And so you risk everything, everything?" he asked me, in amazement. "And this disease, which is probably the same that her mother had— Why, are you going to spend half your life seated beside a grave?"

These last words overwhelmed me with grief; coming from one whose affection for me dictated them—from Cárlos, who was subject to no hallucination—they had a terrible solemnity, more terrible, even, than the "yes" with which I answered them.

I rose, and Cárlos caught me in a close and tender embrace. I left him, plunged in sadness, yet free from that humiliating feeling with which I had begun the interview.

I went back to the parlor. While my sister was trying a new waltz on the guitar, María told me of what had passed between her and my father. Never had she been so demonstrative with me; recalling the conversation with my father, she frequently dropped her eyes in shame; yet happiness played about her lips.

XXVIII.

The arrival of the mails, and the visit of the M——s, had accumulated a great deal to do in my father's study. We worked steadily all the next day, but when we were with the family in the dining-room, María's smiles made me sweet promises for the hour of rest; in their strength I could go cheerfully to the most wearisome labor.

At eight in the evening I went with my father to his bedroom, and responding to my usual good-night, he added, "We have accomplished something, but there is still much to be done; so, then, early to-morrow morning."

On such days as this María was always waiting for me in the evening, talking with Emma and my mother in the parlor, reading to the latter a chapter of the "Imitation," or teaching the children prayers.

"Did you see your friend this morning?" she asked.

"Yes; why do you ask that now?"

"Because I have not been able to ask it before."

"And why are you interested in knowing?"

"Did he ask you to return his visit?"

"Yes."

"And you are going to, aren't you?"

"Certainly."

"He is very fond of you, isn't he?"

"I have always believed so."

"And you still believe it?"

"Why not?"

"Are you as fond of him as when you were together in college?"

"Yes; but what makes you talk about this today?"

"It is because I want you always to be his friend, and hope he will keep on being yours. But you didn't tell him anything?"

"Anything of what?"

"Why, of that."

"What do you mean by 'that?'"

"You know what I mean. You didn't tell him, did you?"

"This is the first time I ever failed to understand you."

"Oh, goodness! of course you understand. It is if you told him about what—"

As I sat looking at her, while she smiled at me in an almost childish eagerness, she continued, "Very well; you need not tell me now."

She began to build little towers with backgammon-counters, with which we were playing.

"If you don't look at me," I said, "I will not confess to you what I told Cárlos."

"Well, then, let's see; now tell," she replied, trying to do what I asked.

"I told him everything."

"Oh, no, not everything?"

"Did I do wrong?"

"As if you could. But, then, why didn't you tell him before he came?"

"My father did not want me to."

"I know; but then he would not have come, and wouldn't that have been better?"

"Undoubtedly, but I could not do it; and now he is satisfied that I did not."

"He will keep on, then, being your friend?"

"There is no reason why he should not."

"True, and I do not want him just for this—"

"Cárlos will thank you as much as I do for that."

"So you parted as usual? And he went away happy?"

"As happy as he could be under the circumstances."

"Then I was not to blame, was I?"

"No, María, and he will not think the less of you for what you have done."

"If he truly cares for you it ought to be so."

"But mamma is going," she added, "and Emma is falling asleep. It's time now, isn't it?"

"Must you go?"

"And what am I going to do? Will you have to write so much to-morrow?"

"Very likely."

"And when Tránsito comes?"

"When is she coming?"

"At twelve; so she sent word."

"By that time we shall have finished. Good-bye till to-morrow."

She took leave of me with the same words, but was surprised that I kept the handkerchief which was in the hand she gave me to press. María did not understand that this scented handkerchief was my treasure for a whole night.

XXIX.

THE next morning my father dictated, and I wrote, while he was shaving. His curling hair, still abundant on the back part of his head, seemed to him a little too long. Opening the door into the corridor, he called my sister.

"She is in the garden," María answered from my mother's sewing-room. "Do you need anything?"

"Do you come, María," he replied. I was just bringing him some letters to sign.

"Do you want to go down the valley to-morrow?" he asked me, as he signed the first one.

"Certainly."

"That will be well, for there is a great deal to do. If we both go, we will be through the sooner. Perhaps Señor A—— will write something in this mail about his journey; he is already delaying in telling us when you are to be ready. Come in, daughter," he added, turning to María, who was waiting outside the door.

She came in, wishing us good-morning. Whether it was that she had heard my father's last words about my journey, or that she could not conquer her timidity in his presence—all the more so since he had spoken to her about our love—she turned slightly pale.

"Look," said my father, smiling, as he showed her his hair, "don't you think I have a great deal of hair?"

She also smiled as she replied, "Yes, Señor."

"Then cut it off a little."

He took a pair of scissors from a case on the table and gave them to her.

"I will sit down so that you can do it more conveniently."

Saying this, he sat down in the middle of the room, turning his back to the window and us.

"Be careful, my daughter, in shearing me," said he when she was about to begin. "Have you begun the other letter?" he asked me.

"Yes, Señor."

He began to dictate, talking with María while I was writing.

"So you think it is funny that I ask you if I have not a lot of hair?"

"No, Señor," she replied, looking at me to ask if she was doing her work properly.

"Well, however it is now," continued my father, "the time has been when it was as black and heavy as some other I know."

María just then dropped the hair she was holding.

"What is it?" asked he, turning to look at her.

"I am going to comb it, so as to cut it better."

"Do you know why it turned gray, and fell out so early?" he asked her, after dictating a sentence to me.

"No, Señor."

"Be careful, my boy, to make no mistake."

María smiled, looking at me furtively lest my father should notice it in the wash-stand mirror, which was in front of him.

"Well, when I was twenty years old," proceeded he, "that is to say, about the time of my marriage, I used to wash my head every day with cologne-water. What nonsense! don't you think so?"

"You do it still," said she.

He laughed, with that agreeable and echoing laugh which he possessed. I read the end of the last sentence written, and he, after dictating another, resumed his conversation with María.

"Is it done now?"

"I think so—don't you?" she added, asking my opinion.

As María leaned forward to brush away the snips of hair which had fallen on my father's neck, the rose which she wore in one of her braids fell at his feet. She was going to pick it up, but my father had already seized it. María returned to her post behind his chair, and he said to her, after carefully examining himself in the glass, "I will put it back now where it was, to reward you for your good work."

He went up to her, and fastening the flower with as much skill as Emma could have displayed, added:

"I am still capable of envy."

María was anxious to go away, out of fear of what he might say in addition, but he detained her, kissed her forehead, and said to her, in a low voice, "To-day will not be like yesterday; we shall get through early."

XXX.

It must have been eleven. Through with the work, I was leaning my elbows on the window-sill in my room.

Those moments of self-forgetfulness when my thought soared through regions almost unknown to me; when the doves, in the shade of the orange-trees loaded down with their clusters of gold, cooed amorously; when María's voice, in still sweeter notes, reached my ears—such moments had for me an unspeakable enchantment.

It was not the branches of the rose-bushes, from which the waters of the brook bore away light petals to deck themselves in their flight; it was not the majestic flight of the black eagles above the neighboring peaks; it was none of these things my eyes rested upon. It was what I shall never see again; what my spirit, broken by sad realities, looks for no more, or admires only in my dreams: the world, nature, as Adam might have seen it on the first morning.

In the dark and winding path from the hills, I saw Tránsito and her father coming, in fulfilment of their promise to María. I crossed the garden, and went up to the top of the first hill, waiting for them on the bridge over the cascade, visible from the house.

As we were in the open air, the mountaineers were not yet timid with me. I asked Tránsito for Braulio.

"He stayed to take advantage of the good sun for weeding. And how is the Virgin of the Chair?"

Tránsito had been accustomed to ask after María by that name, ever since she had observed the striking likeness between the face of her future bridesmaid and that of a beautiful madonna in my mother's oratory.

"The live one is well and expecting you," I replied. "The painted one is supplied with roses and tapers to make you very happy."

As soon as we drew near the house, María and

Emma came out to welcome Tránsito, to whom they said, among other things, that she was grown a very pretty girl; and it was so, for her happiness was beautifying her.

José received the affectionate greetings of the young ladies, hat in hand; throwing down the bag of vegetables he had brought as a present, he went in with us, at my urging, as far as my mother's room. As he crossed the parlor, Mayo, who was asleep under a table, growled at him, and the mountaineer laughed and said: "Hello, grandfather, do you still dislike me? It must be because I am as old as you."

"And Lucía?" María asked Tránsito, "why did she not come with you?"

"She is as lazy as never was, and then she is so shy."

"But Efraín says that she is not so with him," said Emma.

Tránsito laughed before she replied, "With the Señor she is less ashamed, because he comes there so often that she has got over being afraid."

We tried to find out when the marriage was to be. José, to relieve his daughter's embarrassment, replied: "We want it to be a week from to-day. If the thing is well planned, we will do like this: making a very early start from the house, we can reach the village by sunrise; if you leave here at five, you will overtake us just as we get there; and as the priest will have everything ready, we shall get the

business done early. Luisa is an enemy of banquets, and the girls do not dance; so we will spend that Sunday like any other, with the difference that you will make us a visit; and then on Monday, every one to his work. Don't you approve of that?" he concluded, addressing me.

"Yes; but is Tránsito to go to the village on foot?"

"What!" exclaimed José.

"How, then?" asked she, astonished.

"On horseback. Aren't my horses here?"

"But I would rather walk; and that is not all with Lucía—she is afraid of horses."

"But why is that?" asked Emma.

"In Antioquía only white people ride horses. Is it not so, father?"

"Yes; though those who are not white do so when they are very old."

"Who ever told you that you are not white?" I asked Tránsito; "and white as few are."

The girl turned as red as a cherry, as she replied, "What I mean is rich people, the great ladies."

José, as soon as he had gone to salute my father, said good-bye, promising to come back in the afternoon, though we urged him to stay to dinner with us.

At five, as the family walked out to accompany Tránsito as far as the foot of the mountain, María, who was at my side, said to me, "If you had seen my godchild in the bridal dress I have made for her,

and in the bracelets and necklace Emma and mamma gave her, I am sure you would have thought her very pretty."

"And why didn't you call me?"

"Because Tránsito didn't want us to. We must ask mamma what bridesmaids and groomsmen have to say and do in the ceremony."

"Of course, and then they can tell us the responses which those who are married have to make, if we ever have to make them."

Neither María's eyes nor lips made any reply to this allusion to our future happiness; she remained pensive while we walked the short distance up to the foot of the mountain. Braulio was there, waiting for his betrothed, and rose to give us a smiling and respectful greeting.

"We shall be making you go back in the dark," said Tránsito. The mountaineers took affectionate leave of us.

They had penetrated some distance into the forest, when we heard Braulio's fine voice singing refrains of Antioquía.

As we were going down the last slope, Juan, whom María was leading, said to me, "María wants me to be brave, and walk alone; she is tired."

I offered her my arm. We were now but a short distance from the house. The tints which the setting sun had left upon the western sierra were fading away; the moon, rising above the mountains behind us, threw forward upon the faintly illuminated walls

flickering shadows of the willows and climbers in the garden.

I watched María's face, without her knowing it, looking for symptoms of her disease; before an attack of it, always went such a melancholy as that which had suddenly taken possession of her.

"Why are you so sad?" I asked her at last.

"Haven't I been as I always am?" she said, as if awaking from a light sleep. "But you are sad."

"It is because I saw you were."

"How can I please you?"

"Be happy again."

"Happy! And will you be, too?"

"Yes, yes."

"Look; now I am as you wish," she said, smiling. "Is that all you want?"

"That's all—or, stop, what you promised me and have not given me."

"What can it be? I really don't remember."

"Don't you? A lock of your hair."

"And if they see it is gone?"

"Say you did it cutting off a ribbon."

"Is that it?" she asked, after feeling under her neckerchief, and showing me something dark in her hand.

"Yes; give it to me."

"If it is only a ribbon?" she inquired, hiding what she had shown me.

"Very well; I will ask no more."

"Indeed! What was the use of my cutting off my hair? Well, I needed to, to comb it well."

My arm lightly pressed hers, from which the sleeve of muslin and lace had slipped back; her hand sought mine, little by little; she let me lift it to my lips; and leaning on me as we went up the stairs in the corridor, she said to me, in slow and hushed tones: "Now are you happy? Do not let us be sad any more."

My father wanted me to read to him after dinner the last number of *The Day*. When I had finished, he went to his room, and I sought the parlor. Juan came up to me, and leaned his head upon my knees.

"Aren't you going to sleep to-night?" I asked him, with a caress.

"I want you to put me to sleep."

"And why not María?"

"I am angry with her."

"With her? Why, what have you done to her?"

"Well, she does not love me to-night."

"Tell me why not."

"I asked her to tell me the story of Caperuza, and she did not want to. I asked her to kiss me, and she paid no attention."

Juan's complaints made me fear that María's sadness had continued.

"And if you have bad dreams to-night," said I to the child, "she will not get up to stay with you."

"Then in the morning I will not help her pick flowers for your room, and I will not carry her combs for her to the bath."

"Don't say that; she loves you very much. Run and ask her for a kiss and for a story to put you to sleep."

"No," he said, getting up, "I will go and bring her here for you to scold her."

"For me to scold her?"

"I am going to bring her." Saying this, he went in search of her. Soon he reappeared, pretending to lead her back by force. She was smiling, and asking him, "Where are you taking me?"

"Here," replied Juan, making her sit down by my side.

I told María of the child's gossip. She took his head between her hands, and putting her forehead against his, said, "Ah, unkind one! You will have to sleep with him, then."

Juan began to cry, holding out his little arms for me to take him.

"No, no, my little man," said she, "it is only a joke of your Mimiya." And she kissed him.

But the child insisted that I should take him.

"Is this the way you treat me, Juan?" continued María, complainingly. "Very well. He is a big man now. I'll have them take his bed to his brother's room to-night. He doesn't need me any more. I shall be all alone, and shall cry because he does not love me any longer."

She covered her face with her hands to make him think she was crying. Juan waited a moment; but as she kept on pretending to cry, he slowly slipped down from my knees and went up to her to try to uncover her face. Finding María's lips smiling, and her eyes loving, he burst out laughing, put his arms about her waist, and laid his head in her lap, saying: "I love you a heap, I love you with all my heart. I won't be angry or silly any more. To-night I am going to pray that you may make me some new trousers."

"Show me the trousers you have on," I said. Juan stood up on the sofa, between María and me, to make me admire his first trousers.

"How fine!" I exclaimed, embracing him. "If you love me a great deal and are good, I will have them make you a great many pairs; and I will buy you a saddle and leggings and spurs—"

"And a little black horse?" he interrupted.

"Yes."

He gave me a long kiss, and clinging to María's neck, forced her to receive a similar favor. Then he dropped on his knees, and putting his hands together, said his evening prayer, leaning sleepily against María's skirt.

I noticed that María's left hand was playing with something on the boy's head, while a mischievous smile was flitting about her lips. With a swift glance she showed me the curl she had promised me. I leaned forward to take it, but she drew it

back, and said, "And where is mine? Perhaps I ought not to ask it."

"A lock of my hair?" I asked.

She nodded, adding, "Won't it go well in the same locket where I have my mother's?"

XXXI.

THE next day I had to exert myself not to let my father see how disagreeable it was for me to have to go with him to his farms in the valley. As was his custom whenever he was about to undertake a journey, no matter how short it might be, he supervised the arrangement of everything, though it was not necessary. We had to take along some delicacies for the week we were to be away, of a kind my father liked very much, and he laughed as he saw what Emma and María were preparing in the dining-room, and putting into the saddle-bags.

"Heaven help me! daughters. Will all that go in?"

"Yes, Señor," answered María.

"Why, there is enough for a bishop! I see you are taking great pains that we shall lack nothing."

María, who was kneeling down and packing away the provisions, and whose back was towards my father, said to him, timidly, just as I came in, "Well, as you are going to be away so many days—"

"Not many, child," he replied, laughing. "I say

nothing of myself; I thank you for it all; but this boy will be so discontented down there. Look," he added, speaking to me.

"At what?"

"Why, at all they are putting in. With such a supply I may conclude to stay two weeks."

"But it was mamma who ordered it," remarked María.

"Don't you be troubled, little one, everything is very good; but I do not see any of the last purchase of wine, and there is none to be had down there; we must take some."

"It won't go in," said María.

"We shall see."

He went himself to the wine-cellar for the wine he spoke of, and when he came back, with Juan Ángel loaded, in addition, with some cans of salmon, he repeated, "Now we shall see."

"That too!" exclaimed she, seeing the cans.

As my father set about taking out of the saddle-bag a box already packed, María said to him in alarm:

"Can't that stay?"

"Why, my daughter?"

"It's the tarts that you like best, and — and I made them."

"Are they for me, too?" asked my father, in a low tone.

"Well, but they are already packed."

"But I say—"

"I'll be back in a moment," she interrupted, getting up. "There are some handkerchiefs missing."

She went out, but came back immediately.

My father, who was persistent even when he was jesting, said to her again, in the same tone as before, "We will change the tarts for wine."

She scarcely dared look at him, but seeing that breakfast was ready, she said, rising, "Breakfast is served, Señor." Then, addressing Emma, "Let us leave the rest for Estefana; she will do it well."

As I was going into the dining-room, María came out of my mother's apartments, and I stopped her.

"Now," I said, "cut off the lock of hair you want."

"Oh dear, no, I can't do it."

"Tell me where, then."

"Wherever it won't be seen."

She gave me her scissors. She had opened the locket which was hanging from her neck; offering it to me empty, she said, "Put it in this."

"And your mother's?"

"I shall put that on top, so that yours cannot be seen."

She did so, saying to me, "You seem to be pleased to go away to-day."

"No, no; it is not to offend my father; it is right for me to offer to help him in his work."

"Of course; that is proper. I, too, will try not to appear sad, so that mamma and Emma will not be displeased with me."

"Think of me often," I said to her, kissing her mother's hair, and the hand with which she was putting it in the locket.

"Ah, often, very often!" she replied, looking at me with that tenderness and innocence which so well knew how to mingle in her eyes.

We separated, so as to enter the dining-room by different doors.

XXXII.

THE suns of seven days had beaten upon us, and we had worked up to late hours of the nights. On the last, my father was lying on his bed, dictating, while I was writing. The parlor clock struck ten; I repeated the last word of the phrase I had just written; he said nothing; then I turned, thinking that he had not heard me—he was sound asleep. He was a man of tireless energy, but that time the work had been too severe. I lowered the light, closed windows and doors, and waited for him to awake, walking up and down meanwhile in the roomy corridor.

The night was calm and silent. The blue and transparent arch of the heavens glittered with all its summer brilliance. In the dark foliage of the rows of *ceibas* running from the sides of the house all around the court, and in the branches of the orange-trees below, numberless fire-flies were darting; and only at times could one hear the creaking of crossed

twigs, the flapping wings of a frightened bird, or the rustling of the wind.

The white portico, which opened into the court, seventy yards from the house, stood out solitary in the dimness of the plain, projecting its turrets against the shapeless mass of the distant cordilleras, whose peaks were lighted up now and then by flashes from thunder-storms raging on the Pacific.

María, susceptible to the low whisperings, the breathings of that nature, even in her sleep—María, I said to myself, must have fallen asleep with a smile, thinking that to-morrow I shall be again at her side. But afterwards! That afterwards was terrible; it was my journey.

I thought I heard the gallop of a horse across the plain; I supposed it must be the servant whom we had sent to the city four days before, and whom we were impatiently expecting, as he was to bring some important letters.

"Camilo?" I asked.

"Yes, master," he replied, handing me a package of letters.

The rattling of his spurs awoke my father.

"How is this, my man?" he inquired.

"I left at twelve, my master, and as the mountain-slide reaches as far as Guayabo, I was delayed very much."

"Very good. Tell Feliciana to give you something to eat, and take good care of that horse."

My father glanced over the signatures of some of

the letters, and finding at last the one he wanted, said to me, "Begin with that one."

I read out several lines, but on coming to a certain point, stopped involuntarily. He took the letter, and with contracted lips, while his eyes devoured its contents, finished the reading, and flung the paper upon the table, saying:

"That man has killed me! Read that letter. At last, what your mother dreaded has happened."

I took up the letter to convince myself that what I had guessed was true.

"Read it aloud," added my father, walking up and down the room, and wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"This is beyond remedy," he said, as soon as I finished. "What an amount, and in what circumstances! I am the only one to blame."

I interrupted him to point out a way in which I thought we could make the loss less severe.

"That is true," he remarked, listening to me with considerable calmness; "that can be done. But who would have suspected it? I shall die without having learned to distrust men."

He spoke the truth. Many times before in his business he had received similar lessons. One night, when he was alone in the city, an employé of his came to his room—a man whom he had sent to Chocoes to exchange a considerable amount of farm produce for gold, which he needed to send to foreign creditors.

The agent said to him: "I come to get you to pay my mule-hire, and to shoot me. I have gambled and lost all you intrusted to me."

"All? Have you lost all?" asked my father.

"Yes, Señor."

"Take from this drawer the money you need." Calling a servant, he added, "This gentleman has just arrived; tell them inside, so that they may serve his dinner."

But those were other days. There are strokes of misfortune which one receives in youth with indifference, without uttering a complaint; then one trusts in the future. But those which come upon one in old age seem the work of a cowardly enemy; it is but a short distance to the grave.

Three hours had passed. As my father went to bed he said to me, "We must conceal from your mother, as far as possible, what has happened; and we shall also have to delay our return for another day."

Although I had always heard him say that his peaceful sleep brought him relief in all the disasters of life, I saw—when, shortly after he had spoken to me, I was convinced that he was asleep—such intrepid resignation in his slumber, such courage in his quiet, that I could only stand and look at him for a long time.

It was not yet dawn when I had to go out in search of better air to calm the sort of fever which had troubled me during that sleepless night. Only

the song of the *titiribí* and the *guacharacas* of the neighboring woods heralded the morning; nature appeared to be lazily waking from sleep. At the first light of day *asomas* and *azulejos* began to flutter about in the banana-trees and in the groves; pairs of doves took up their flight towards neighboring fields; the chattering of flocks of parrots mingled with the noise of a clamorous brook; and from the blossom-laden summits of the cacao-trees, the herons rose in slow and easy flight.

Never again shall I admire those songs, drink in those perfumes, or gaze upon those landscapes flooded with light. To-day strangers dwell in my father's house.

The afternoon was nearly gone when, the next day, my father and I were riding up the long green mountain-slope to our house. The drove of horses that were pasturing near the path gave way to us, snorting in their fright, and the *pellares* rose from the edges of the streams to threaten us with their cries and circling flight.

We could see the eastern corridor, and the family awaiting us there; and again my father charged me to conceal the cause of our delay, and to try to appear unconcerned.

XXXIII.

Not all those expecting us were in the corridor. María was standing a few rods from the court-yard gate, upon one of the large rocks to our left which commanded the valley. Emma was urging her to come down. We drew near them. María's hair, flowing in long and shining curls, showed black against her green muslin dress; she sat down to keep the wind from blowing out her skirts, saying to my sister, who was laughing at her anxiety, "Don't you see that I can't do it?"

"Child," said my father, half-way between alarm and laughter; "how did you ever get up there?"

She was ashamed of her exploit, and answered, "We were all alone—"

"That is to say," interrupted my father, "that we ought to ride on so that you can come down. How did Emma get down?"

"The idea!—I helped her."

"It was because I was not afraid," said Emma.

"Come on, then," concluded my father, addressing me; "but have a care."

He knew perfectly well that I would stay. María had just said to me with her eyes, "Don't go." My father got on his horse again, and rode towards the house; I let my horse follow on alone.

"Here is where we got up," said María, pointing to some scratches and hollows in the rock.

She reached out her rather tremulous hand, and helped me up. I seated myself at her feet, and she said: "Don't you see how hard it is? What will papa say! He must think we are crazy."

I looked at her without replying. The light in her eyes, timid as they were before mine, and the slight pallor on her cheeks told me, as they so often had, that she was happy.

"I shall go on alone," said Emma, for the second time, and moved away a few steps to make us believe she would do it.

"No, no, wait a moment," said María, rising up.

Seeing that I did not stir, she asked me, "What is the matter?"

"We are very comfortable here."

"Yes, but Emma wants to go, and mamma will be expecting you. Help me get down; I am not afraid now. Let me have your handkerchief."

She twisted it up, adding, "You hold it this way, and when you can't reach me with your hand, I will take hold of that."

Her plan worked admirably, and once on the ground, she said, "How will you get down?"

I leaped from the lowest part of the rock to the turf, and offered her my arm to walk to the house.

"If I had not come, how would you have got down, madcap?"

"I should have got down alone; I was just going

to, when you came. But I was afraid of falling, there was so much wind. We climbed up there yesterday, and I got down easily. Why were you so long delayed?"

"We had to wind up some important matters. What have you been doing all these days?"

"Wishing they would pass."

"Is that all?"

"Oh, sewing—and thinking a great deal."

"What about?"

"Many things—which one thinks of but does not mention."

"Not even to me?"

"To you least of all."

"Have your own way."

"Because you know them already."

"Haven't you read anything?"

"No, it makes me sad to read alone, and I don't like any more those stories 'Evenings at the Villa,' and 'Afternoons at the Grange.' I was going to read some more of 'Atala,' but as you told me there is a passage in it not exactly— Emma!" she called, "why do you hurry on so fast?"

Emma looked around, smiled, and kept on.

"What were you doing night before last at ten?" I asked.

"Night before last? Ah, why do you ask me that?"

"I was then very unhappy, thinking of those things which one thinks of but does not mention."

"No, no, you can mention them."

"Tell me what you were doing, and then I'll tell you."

"I am afraid to."

"Afraid?"

"Perhaps it is very silly. I was sitting with mamma in the corridor. We heard something that sounded like the shutters of your window, and I thought that they had been left unfastened. I took a light and went to see — what nonsense! it makes me afraid to remember what happened."

"Go on."

"We opened the door, and we saw sitting upon one of the shutters which the wind was shaking, a black bird about the size of a very large dove. It uttered a cry such as I had never heard. It seemed to be dazzled by the light I held, and put it out as it flew over our heads just as we were running away in fright. That night I dreamed—but what makes you look like that?"

"Like what?" I said, trying to conceal the impression made upon me by her story. What she told me, had taken place at the very hour when my father and I were reading that wretched letter; and that black bird was the same that had brushed my face during the storm, the night that María suffered a return of her attack—the same that had startled me several times at sunset by sweeping above my head.

"Like what?" replied María. "I see I did wrong to tell you this."

"Can you imagine that?"

"It is not imagination."

"What did you dream?"

"I must not tell you."

"Not even after a while?"

"Alas! never, perhaps."

Emma was just opening the door into the court-yard.

"Wait for us," called María; "do, we are truly coming this time."

We joined her, and they two walked hand in hand the rest of the way. I felt myself mastered by a vague dread; I was afraid of something, though I could not divine what. But I remembered my father's injunction, and endeavored to control myself.

XXXIV.

The next day, the 12th of December, was to be Tránsito's wedding-day. After our return, word was sent to José that we would be in the parish church between seven and eight. It had been decided that my mother, María, Felipe, and I should go, as my sister was to stay to get ready all sorts of presents, which were to be sent very early to the mountain, so that the bridal couple should find them on their return.

That night, after supper, my sister was playing the guitar, seated on a sofa in the corridor outside

of my room, and María and I were talking as we leaned over the railing.

"Something," she was saying, "something troubles you, and I cannot guess what."

"But what can it be? Don't you see me happy? Am I not as you hoped I would be when I returned to you?"

"No; you have tried to appear so, but I have discovered something new in you—you are dissembling."

"What, with you?"

"Yes."

"You are right; I am compelled to live feigning."

"No, Señor. I do not mean that, but to-night."

"For four months I have been deceiving—"

"Me also? Me? Could you deceive me?"

She tried to look into my eyes, to see if what she feared were true; but as I laughed at her earnestness, she said, as if ashamed of it, "Explain that to me."

"There isn't any explanation."

"For God's sake—for the sake of what you most love, explain it to me."

"It is all true."

"It can't be."

"But let me finish. To take revenge for what you were just thinking, I will not tell you unless you ask me for the sake of what you know I most love."

"I do not know what it is."

"Well, then, convince yourself that I have deceived you."

"No, no; I was going to tell you. But how can I tell you?"

"Think."

She paused a moment, and then said, "I have thought now."

"Tell me, then."

"For the sake of what you love most, next to God and your—I hope it is I."

"No, it won't do that way."

"Why, how then? I am afraid that what you say is true."

"Say it another way."

"I will try; but if you don't like it this time—"

"What then?"

"Nothing; please don't look at me."

"I'm not."

Then she succeeded in saying, in a very low voice, "For the sake of María, who loves you—"

"So much!" I finished, taking her hands in mine.

"Now tell me," she urged.

"I have been deceiving you, because I have not dared to confess to you how much I really love you."

"Why haven't you told me?"

"Because I was afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of finding that you love me less than I do you."

"Afraid of that? Then you were the one to be deceived."

"If I had told you—"

"And do not the eyes say things against one's will?"

"Do you think so?"

"I do, because yours have shown it to me. Now tell me the reason you have been so strange to-night. Have you seen the doctor recently?"

"Yes."

"What did he say about me?"

"The same thing as before; that you would not be sick again. Don't talk about that."

"Only one word. What else did he say? He thinks my disease is the same as my mother's—perhaps he is right."

"Oh no! he never said that. And aren't you, then, perfectly well now?"

"Yes; still, in spite of that, many times, oh, many times I have thought about that sickness with dread. But I believe that God has heard me; I have prayed to him so earnestly that it should not come back."

"Perhaps not so earnestly as I have."

"Pray for it always."

"Always, María. Listen. It is true that there is a reason for my being disturbed to-night; but you see that you have made me forget it."

I told her of the news we had received two days before.

"Oh, that black bird!" she said, as soon as I ended; and she looked towards my room in terror.

"How can you be so much troubled by a mere coincidence?"

"What I dreamed that night is what troubles me."

"Do you still think you can't tell me?"

"Not now; some time. Let us talk with Emma before you go. She is so good to us."

In half an hour we separated, promising each other to get up very early to begin our ride to the parish church.

Juan Ángel knocked at my door before five. Everything was ready. María came out with a cup of coffee for me, and called Felipe to come and get his.

"We'll see to-day," said he, smiling mischievously; "we'll see who'll be afraid. And the black is just raging."

María was as bewitching as my eyes must have told her she was. Upon her thick and shining braids rested a graceful black velvet hat, trimmed and tied under her chin with Scotch ribbon; on its brim, half hidden by her blue veil, was a rose still dewy. With one hand she held up the skirt of her black dress. Her blue belt was fastened with a diamond clasp. A deep cape hung from her shoulders.

"Which horse do you want to ride?" I asked her.

"The black."

"But you can't do that," I replied, in surprise.

"Why not? Are you afraid he will throw me?"

"Of course I am."

"I have ridden him before. Don't you think I can do it again? Ask Emma if I am not more skilful than she. You will see how gentle the black will be with me."

"Why, he won't let you touch him. It is so long since you rode him that your skirt may frighten him."

"I promise not to even show him the whip."

Felipe, already mounted on his little chestnut, Chibo, was pricking him with his new spurs, and riding about the court-yard. My mother, too, was ready to set out. I placed her on her favorite bay, the only one, according to her, that was not a wild animal. I was very uneasy as I helped María mount the black. Before she leaped from the step to the saddle, she patted the horse's neck. He had been very restless, but then stood motionless awaiting his load, and champing his bit, mindful of the lightest rustling of her dress.

"Don't you see?" said María, already on his back. "He knows me. When papa bought him for you, this foot was sore, and I made Juan Ángel dress it carefully every afternoon."

The horse snorted uneasily; but he knew that caressing voice. We set out, and Juan Ángel fol-

lowed us, carrying on the pommel of his saddle a bundle containing the garments which the ladies would need in the village. María's horse, proud of his load, seemed to wish to display his smoothest, daintiest pace. The jet-black mane quivered on his arched neck, and, falling between the short, eager ears, veiled his gleaming eyes. María rode him with an air of careless grace—as secure as if she were upon a plodding mule.

After we had gone several rods, she seemed to have lost all fear of the horse; and observing that I was reassured, she said to me, so that my mother could not hear her:

"I'm going to give him a cut, just one."

"Be careful how you do it."

"Only one, just to show you that he won't mind it. You are unfair to the black, and prefer that gray you are on."

"Now that he is so good to you, it will be different."

"You rode him the night you went for the doctor."

"Yes, I remember; he is a fine animal."

"But, after all, you don't value him as he deserves."

"You even less; for you want to mortify him."

"You shall see that he will not mind."

"Carefully, carefully, María! Please give me the whip."

"We'll let it go till we reach the plain."

She laughed at the anxiety into which her threat threw me.

"What is it?" asked my mother, who had overtaken us; I had slowed our pace so that she might come up with us.

"Nothing, Señora," answered María; "only Efraín is sure the horse is going to throw me."

"No, it is because you—" I began, but she put the whip-handle to her lips with a gesture bidding me be silent, and then handed it to me.

"How is it you are so brave to-day?" my mother asked her. "The other time you rode that horse you were afraid."

"Yes, and you had to take another instead," added Felipe.

"You are doing me a very bad turn," replied María; "the Señor had made up his mind that I was a famous horsewoman."

"But aren't you afraid to-day?" persisted my mother.

"Yes, I am, but not so much. The horse is much more gentle, and then there is some one to scold him if he rears."

When we reached the plain, the sun, tearing his way through the clouds which swathed the mountains behind us, flung metallic rays upon the forests which here and there came down into the level in winding lines or in isolated clumps of trees; the waters of the little brooks which we crossed, coming out into the gleam of the sun's light, ran away to

hide themselves in the shadows, and the distant windings of the Zabaletas seemed as if of liquid silver, bordered by the blue of the thickets.

As we entered the great forest, leaving the plain behind us, María and I remained silent for a long time; but Felipe did not break off his chatter, asking his mother a thousand questions about all he saw.

Finally, María turned to me, and said: "What are you thinking about so intently? You are becoming sad again, as you were last night—very different from what you were a little while ago. Is the misfortune, then, so great?"

"I was not thinking about that; you make me forget that."

"Is the loss irrecoverable?"

"Perhaps not. But what I was thinking about is Braulio's happiness."

"About his only?"

"I can easily imagine Braulio's. He is going to be completely happy from to-day on; but I am to go away, and I am to be away from you for years."

She lifted her veil, and said, "That loss, then, is not very great?"

"Why do you insist on talking about that?"

"Can't you guess? If it is only my thought, I ought not to confide it to you. But I should prefer that you had not seen me so cheerful to-day after what you told me last night."

"Is it this news that made you cheerful?"

"It made me sad when you told me; but afterwards—"

"Afterwards, what?"

"I thought differently about it."

"And that is what made you pass from sadness to joy?"

"Not exactly, but—"

"Well, to feel as you do to-day?"

"Didn't I say so? I knew it would not please you to see me this way, and I don't want you to think me capable of being merely silly."

"You! Do you think I ever could?"

"Why not? I am only a girl like any other, and might not look on serious things as I ought to."

"No, you would not do that."

"Yes, Señor; yes, I would; at least, it will seem so, till I explain myself. But let us talk with mamma a little, lest she think it strange you talk so much with me; and meanwhile I will see if I can tell you all."

We did so. But, after a quarter of an hour, our horses were again side by side. We were coming out once more into the open country, and could see the white spire of the parish church, and the red roofs of the houses, in the midst of the foliage of the gardens.

"Tell me, María," I said then.

"There! you see that you yourself want to clear it up. But suppose the reason I am going to give you is not a good one? It would have been better

not to be happy ; but as you have not chosen to teach me to dissemble—"

"How teach you what I do not know?"

"What a fine memory! Have you forgotten what you said to me last night? I am going to take advantage of that lesson."

"From to-day on?"

"Not after this," she replied, smiling at the very air of gravity which she tried to put on. "Listen, then. I could not help being happy to-day, because as soon as I left you last night I thought that out of this loss of papa's might come—but what would he think of me if he knew this?"

"Explain yourself, and I will tell you what he would think."

"If this sum he has lost is so large," she said to me then, combing the mane of her horse with her whip-handle, "papa will have more need of you—he will consent to have you assist him now—"

"Yes, yes," I responded, mastered by the timid and anxious glance she gave me, at this confession of what she so much feared would make her appear at fault.

"Do you really think it may be so?"

"I will relieve my father of the promise to send me to Europe to complete my studies; I will agree to struggle at his side till the end to save his credit; and he will consent—he must consent! In that way we shall never separate, you and I—never separate. And then, very soon—"

Without lifting her eyes, she assented; and her blush, beneath the veil with which the breeze kept playing, was angelic.

When we reached the village, Braulio came to greet us, and to say that the priest was awaiting us. The venerable man, in fact, when he saw us approaching his house at the side of the church, came out to meet us, and invited us to breakfast with him; but we excused ourselves as politely as possible.

As the ceremony began, Braulio's face proclaimed his happiness. Tránsito looked persistently at the floor, and made her answers in an unnatural voice. José, standing beside the priest, held a candle in his unsteady grasp; and his eyes, which passed continually from the face of the priest to that of his daughter, if they were not actually full of tears, showed that they had been.

As the minister blessed the joined hands of the pair, Tránsito ventured to look at her husband; in that look, love, humility, and goodness were mingled; it was the only promise she could make the man she loved, after the one she had just made in the presence of God.

We all heard mass, and as we left the church, Braulio told us that while we were mounting they would set out from the village; but that we should overtake them not very far away. In half an hour we came up with the pretty pair and José, who was leading on ahead the old gray mule on which he had brought down the presents for the priest, vegetables

for the market, and the holiday finery of the young people. We slowed down our pace to theirs for a little while. Tránsito walked by María's side; she spoke little, but in her bearing and face there was an indescribable union of modesty, gratitude, and unaffected joy.

As we took leave of them, promising to come to their house that afternoon, Tránsito smiled on María in an almost sisterly way; the latter took the hand timidly offered her by her goddaughter, and said, "I am sorry to think of your going all the way on foot."

"Why, Señorita?"

"Señorita?"

"*Madrina*, then?"

"Yes, yes."

"Thanks. We shall go slowly, sha'n't we?" she said, addressing the mountaineers.

"Yes," answered Braulio; "and if you are not ashamed to lean on me going up the steep places, you will get through without being tired."

My mother insisted that José should bring all the family to dine with us the next day, and he had to promise that he would try to do it. On our way home the talk was general, as María and I tried to make it for the sake of my mother, who was complaining of fatigue, as she always did when riding. But just as we were reaching the house, María said to me in a voice which I alone could hear, "Are you going to speak of that to papa to-day?"

"Yes."

"Don't do it to-day."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"When do you want me to do it?"

"If within a week he says nothing to you about the journey, then seek an opportunity for telling him. And do you know what one would be the best? Some day after you have worked together a great deal; I am sure he will then be much pleased with your offer of aid."

"But in the mean time I cannot endure not to know whether he will accept."

"Suppose he doesn't?"

"Are you afraid he won't?"

"Yes."

"What shall we do, in that case?"

"You will obey him."

"And you?"

"Alas! I do not know."

"You must believe that he will accept, María."

"No, no; for if I am mistaken, I know that it will do me great harm. But you do it the way I say; it may be, in that way, all will turn out well."

XXXV.

As we reached home, I was astonished to see the shutters closed in the windows of my mother's room. Eloisa ran out to us making signs that we should be quiet.

"Papa," she said, "has gone to lie down because he is not feeling well."

Only María and I could give the cause, and our glances met. She and my mother went in instantly, and I followed them. As my father understood that we would be anxious, he said to us in a voice which was unsteady from his chill: "It is nothing. Perhaps, when I got up, I was careless, and took cold."

His hands and feet were cold and his head hot. María and my mother at once put on their house dresses. Breakfast was served, but they did not attend. Emma came to me, as I rose from the table, to say that my father wanted me. His fever was increasing.

"Put out some of these lights," he was saying, when I went into his room. There was but one, and that was on a table hidden from him by the curtains.

"Efraín is here now," my mother said.

He did not seem to hear. After a moment, he

said, as if talking to himself: "There is no remedy for this. Why does not Efraín come to finish it all up at once?"

I made him see that I was there.

"Well," he went on, "bring them to me to sign."

My mother leaned her head upon her hand. María and Emma looked at me to see if there really were letters.

"As soon as you are more rested we will attend to everything."

"Oh, that man, that man!" he murmured, and then sank into a sort of stupor.

My mother called me to the parlor, and said: "It seems to me we ought to call the doctor. What do you think?"

"I think so, too; for even if the fever leaves him, nothing will be lost by having Mayn come, and if—"

"No, no," she interrupted. "When a sickness begins like this it is always serious."

As soon as I had sent off a servant after the doctor, I returned to my father's side; he was calling for me again.

"When did they come back?" he asked.

"More than an hour ago."

"Where is your mother?"

"I will go and call her."

"Don't let her know anything of this."

"No, Señor; have no care."

"Did you add that postscript to the letter?"

"Yes, Señor."

"Did you get out of the closet that correspondence and the receipt?"

He was possessed with the idea of making up the loss he had suffered.

The doctor came at four. The fever had not yielded, and the sick man kept on alternating between delirium and stupor. None of the household remedies had been of any avail. The doctor ordered a bath prepared, and got everything ready for cupping; then he went with me to my room. While he was compounding a draught, I tried to find out what he thought about the sickness.

"It is probably a brain-fever," he said.

"Do you think it a severe case?"

"These fevers always begin this way, but if they are attacked in time we can often conquer them. Has your father been working hard recently?"

"Yes, Señor; we were down at the lower farms till yesterday, and had a great deal to do."

"Has he had anything to vex him, any serious disappointment?"

"I believe I ought to speak with you frankly. Three days ago, he had news that an investment of great importance had been lost."

"And did it affect him greatly? Excuse me for speaking in this way; I think it is necessary. There are some diseases that spring from the mind, and disguise themselves under the symptoms of others."

"You may be almost certain that this misfortune

of which I have spoken has been the principal cause of his sickness. But I must tell you that my mother knows nothing of what has happened, as my father did not want her to be troubled by it."

"That is well. You have done right to speak to me of this. Be sure that I shall make a prudent use of the secret."

The doctor watched till two in the morning. The fever had not abated a particle. Mayn went to lie down, begging us to call him if we noticed any alarming symptoms.

My mother rested in an arm-chair near the head of the bed; from her moving lips, and her gaze directed towards an Ecce Homo on the door, it was clear that she was praying. Already, from words of my father in his delirium, she had divined all that had occurred. At the foot of the bed, kneeling upon a sofa, and half hidden by the curtains, María was trying to warm the sick man's feet; he had just complained anew of the cold. I went to her, and whispered, "Go and rest a little."

"Why?" she replied, lifting her head—a head as beautiful in the negligence of watching as when freshly adorned in the morning for the ride.

"Because you will do yourself harm, watching all night."

"You mustn't think that. What time is it?"

"Nearly three."

"I am not tired. It will be daylight soon. You

go and sleep, and if it is necessary I will have you awakened."

"How are his feet?"

"Alas! very cold."

"Let me take your place a while, and then I will go and lie down."

"Very well," she replied, getting up carefully so as not to make the least noise.

"It is only for a moment," she said, "till I go and see what Juan wants."

The little fellow had waked, and was calling her. As the clock struck three, María returned to claim her seat.

"Is it time for the draught?" I asked her.

"I think it is."

"Ask my mother."

The latter took the dose and the light, and we went up to the bed. At the sound of our voices, my father opened his eyes. They were very much congested; and he made an effort to shade them with his hand from the light. We tried to get him to take the medicine. He complained of pain, and looking around with a vacant gaze, said, "I am thirsty."

"This will make you feel better," said my mother, offering him the glass.

He fell back on the pillows, putting both hands to his head, and saying, "Here is where it is."

We endeavored again to get him to sit up, but in vain. My mother's face showed how much she was frightened by that extreme prostration. María sat

down on the edge of the bed, and said, in her most affectionate voice: "Papa, try to sit up and take this. I will help you."

"Let us see, daughter," he replied, feebly.

María succeeded in supporting him against her breast, keeping her arm about his shoulders. Her black braids shaded the gray and venerable head, tenderly pillowed upon her bosom. He took the medicine, and María gently placed him again upon the pillows.

"Heavens, how weak he is!" she said, as we went back to the table where the light stood.

"That medicine is a narcotic," I said, to calm her.

"But the delirium is not so incessant now. What did the doctor say?"

"That he must wait a little before using more vigorous remedies."

"Go and lie down. We are enough here. Hark, it is half-past three. I will wake up Emma to stay with me, and you can get mamma to go and rest a little."

"You are growing very pale. This is going to do you a great deal of harm."

"Oh no; you will see that it will not affect me at all."

"Perhaps not, if you will go to rest now. I will have you called in the morning."

I got them all three to go, and I sat down alone at the head of the bed. The sick man's sleep was

troubled, and at times delirious words escaped him. For an hour my imagination was filled with dreadful pictures of all that might come from a calamity, about which I could not stop to think without an anguished heart.

It was beginning to dawn. Lines of light began to enter by the cracks of doors and windows. The light of the lamp became paler and paler. I could hear the cries of the *coclíes* and the fowls.

The doctor came in.

"Did they call you?" I asked.

"No; I ought to be here now. How has he been?"

I told him all that I had noticed. He felt the sick man's pulse, glancing at his watch.

"Absolutely nothing," he said, as if to himself. "The draught?" he added.

"He took it once more."

"Let us give it to him again; and so as not to disturb him more than once, we will put on the caustics now."

Emma helped us to do it all. The doctor was plainly very anxious.

XXXVI.

TEN days passed. Joy returned to our home; for my father, after a critical illness, was convalescent. The doctor advised us to keep him as free as possible from all care. So we studiously avoided speaking to him about business matters. As soon as he could sit up, we asked him to choose a book to have read to him a few moments at a time; and he chose the "Diary of Napoleon at St. Helena"—a book which always interested him intensely.

Gathering in my mother's sewing-room, Emma, María, and I used to take turns in reading to him; and if we saw him growing sad at any time, Emma would play on the guitar to amuse him. At other times, he would talk to us of the days of his youth, of his parents and brothers, or would speak enthusiastically of the journeys which he had made as a young man. Sometimes he would joke with my mother about the customs of Chocó, only to laugh at her coming to the defence of her native land.

"How old was I when we were married?" he once asked her, after having spoken of the first days of their wedded life, and of a fire which left them completely ruined two months after their marriage.

"Twenty-one," she replied.

"No, child; I was twenty. I deceived your mother, as I was afraid she would think me a mere boy. And as wives never remember how old their husbands are, after once they begin to get old, it has been easy for me to correct the account."

"Only twenty?" exclaimed Emma.

"That's what he says," replied my mother.

"And how old were you, mamma?" asked María.

"I was sixteen; just a year older than you are."

"But make her tell you," said my father, "how much I thought of her from the time she was fifteen, for it was then I resolved to marry her."

"Do tell us, mamma," said María.

"Ask him first," replied she, "what he determined to do on account of thinking so much of me as he says."

We all turned to my father, and he said, "Why, I resolved to marry her."

The conversation was broken off by Juan Ángel's coming in from the village with the mail. He had several papers and two letters, both of the latter in Señor A——'s handwriting, and one of them dated some time before. As soon as I saw the signature, I handed them to my father.

"Ah yes," he said, returning them to me; "I was expecting letters from him."

The first one simply announced that he would not be able to start on his journey to Europe under four months, and that, therefore, I need not hurry my preparations. I did not dare to look at María.

My one thought was, even if the journey is not given up, I shall have three months more of happiness. My father, completely undisturbed, waited for me to finish the letter, and then said: "What's to be done? Let me see what the other one says."

I read the first lines, and perceiving that I should not be able to conceal my agitation, went up to the window as if to get a better light, but really so as to turn my back to the others. The main part of the letter was as follows: "Two weeks ago I wrote you that I should be obliged to delay my journey for four months; but the difficulties in the way have unexpectedly disappeared, and I hasten to notify you that I shall be in Cali the 30th of next January, where I shall hope to meet Efraín, so that we may set out for the coast on February 2d. I was sorry to hear of your severe sickness, but have just received news that you are out of danger. Give my good wishes to your family for the speedy restoration of your health. I hope, accordingly, that there will be no difficulty in giving me the pleasure of Efraín's company, for whom, as for yourself, I cherish a particular regard. Be kind enough to let him see this part of the letter."

When I turned to take my seat, I found my father's eyes fixed upon me. María and my sister went out.

"What day of the month is it to-day?" asked my father.

"The twenty-sixth," I replied.

"Then we have only a month. We can't go to sleep."

There was in his accent and face that calmness which revealed an unchangeable resolve. A servant came in to tell me that the horse which I had ordered was ready.

"When you come back from your ride," said my father, "we will answer that letter, and you yourself can take it to the village, as to-morrow you ought certainly to visit the farms."

"I shall not be long," I said, as I went out.

I had to conceal what I was suffering; in solitude to call upon that sweet hope which had flattered me, only to leave me alone in the presence of the reality; alone to grieve, so that María should not see my tears.

I rode down to the broad shores of the river, where it becomes less impetuous as it meets the plains. Sweeping in majestic curves, it flows at first among beautifully carpeted hills, kissing the leaves of the *carboneros* and guava-trees on the bank; then it hides behind the last mountainous ridges, where it seems to murmur its final adieu to solitude, and at last loses itself in the distant blue plain, where, just then, the setting sun was turning to lilac and gold its undulating stream.

When I returned, climbing up the winding paths that led down to the shore, the night was already putting on its summer splendor. The foam on the waters of the river shone with dazzling whiteness.

The waves quivered in their channels as though whispering secrets to the breezes which hung above them caressingly. The quiet stretches of the river which were not in shadow reflected in their depths the twinkling stars; and where the branches of the forest interlaced from one shore to the other, and formed weird canopies, the fitful light of wandering glow-worms was flashed back from below. Only the hum of nocturnal insects broke the silence of the slumbering woods; though from time to time the owl, jealous guardian of the thickets, flew about me giving its sinister hoot.

The house, though already lighted up, was silent when I gave the horse to Juan Ángel. My father was expecting me, walking back and forth in the parlor.

"You were gone long," said he. "Do you want to write those letters?"

"I should prefer first to talk with you about my journey."

"Well, what about it?" he said, seating himself.

I remained standing near the table, turning my back to the candle.

"Since the misfortune that has occurred," I said; "since that loss whose amount I can appreciate, I think I ought to tell you that I do not wish to hold you to the sacrifice involved in the completion of my education. Before the family suffered this defalcation, I told you that I should be well pleased to go on aiding you in your work; but you declined my offer

then, and nothing was left for me to say. Now the case is very different, and I hope you will accept my proposition. I will cheerfully renounce the advantages you have proposed me in the completion of my studies, as it is my duty to relieve you from the promise you have given me."

He replied: "All this is, up to a certain point, very thoughtful and wise. I am sure that honorable feelings inspire you to speak as you have done. But I must tell you that my determination is irrevocable. The expense which the remainder of your education will be to me will not make my situation any worse, and as soon as you have finished your course, the family will gather fruit from the seed I am sowing. Besides," he added, after a short pause, during which he resumed his walk, "I believe that you have too much pride to break off foolishly what you have so well begun."

"I will do all within my power," I answered, in complete despair; "I will do all I can to fulfil the hopes you entertain for me."

"That is right. Go on calmly. I am sure that by the time you return I shall have successfully carried through the plans I have made to pay my debts. Your position will be a very good one four years from now, and then María will become your wife."

He relapsed into silence again for some minutes, but finally said, stopping in front of me: "Let us set about the writing, then. Bring the necessaries here; it may do me harm to go into the study."

He had just finished dictating to me a long and affectionate letter to Señor A——, and wanted my mother, who came in just then, to hear it read. I was reading what follows, when María came in, bringing the tea-service for my father: "Efraín will be ready to go to Cali the 30th of January. You will meet him there, and can set out for Buenaventura the 2d of February, according to your plans."

María, to whom my back was turned, put down the cup and saucer upon the table within my father's reach. As she did it she was full in the light. Her face was almost livid. As she took the teapot from Estefana, she had to steady herself by my chair. My father held out his cup for her to fill, but when he saw that her hand trembled so that she was in danger of spilling the tea, looked at her, and said, "That will do—that will do, daughter."

The cause of her agitation was evident to him. He watched María as she slowly walked towards the dining-room, and then, turning to my mother, asked her, "Do you see that?"

We all remained silent. After a little, I went out under the pretext of carrying the writing materials to the study.

XXXVII.

At eight the bell rang for dinner; but I felt that I could not yet control myself in María's presence. My mother knocked at my door.

"Is it possible," she said, when she had entered, "that you are going to allow yourself to be mastered by this sorrow? Can't you show yourself as strong as at other times? You must do it, not only because your father will be offended, but also because you are the one who ought to give María courage."

As she said this her voice had a tone of mingled reproach and tenderness. She went on to speak of all the advantages that journey would bring me, though she did not try to hide the grief of separation I should have to endure. Finally she said: "During these four years, I shall look upon María not only as a beloved daughter, but also as the woman destined to make you happy, and well deserving your love. I shall talk to her of you constantly, and shall try to make her think of your return as a reward of your obedience and hers."

I lifted my head, and our eyes sought each other, and promised what our lips could not utter.

"Go to the dining-room, then," she said, before leaving, "and conceal your feelings as much as you

can. Your father and I have been talking about you a great deal, and it is quite possible that something may be devised to give you great comfort."

Only Emma and María were in the dining-room. Whenever my father was away, I sat at the head of the table. Seated on opposite sides, the two were waiting for me. Some time passed without our speaking. Both their faces expressed great dejection, but my sister's was not so pale, and her glance had not the brilliant languor of beautiful eyes that have been weeping. It was she who said to me:

"Have you concluded to go to the farm to-morrow?"

"Yes, but I shall not be there more than two days."

"You must take Juan Ángel, so that he can see his mother. Perhaps she is worse."

"I expect to take him. Higinio writes that Feliciana is worse, and that Doctor Mayn, who has been prescribing for her, has had to go away to Cali in response to an urgent summons."

"Give Feliciana affectionate messages from us," said María. "If she continues sick, we will ask mamma to take us to see her."

Emma broke the silence which followed, by saying to me: "Tránsito, Lucía, and Braulio were here this afternoon, and were very sorry not to see you. We had thought we would go to see them next Sunday. They have been so kind during papa's illness!"

"Let us go Monday; I will be here by that time."

"If you had seen how sorry they were when I told them of your voyage to Europe!"

Estefana came in to say that my mother wanted María. I walked up and down in the dining-room, hoping to be able to speak to her before going to bed.

The night continued calm. The rose-bushes were motionless. Not a rustle could be detected in the tops of the trees. Only the sighs of the river disturbed the impressive silence. Against the dark-blue mantle of the mountains, some scattered clouds were whitening, like scarfs of snowy gauze made to ripple by the wind over the blue skirt of an odalisk. The transparent circle of the sky arched itself above the numberless peaks, like a vase of blue-tinted glass incrusted with diamonds.

María still delayed. My mother came to ask me to come into the parlor. My father was seated on a sofa, María at his side. She did not lift her eyes to look at me. He pointed me to a seat near hers.

"Well, my daughter," he said to María, "do you want me to repeat the question I asked you when your mamma went out, so that you may reply to it in Efraín's presence?"

My father smiled, and she slowly shook her head.

"How shall we do it, then?" he urged.

María ventured to glance at me, and that look revealed everything to me.

"Isn't it true," my father asked her again, "that

you promise Efraín to be his wife when he returns from Europe?"

After several moments of silence, she sought my eyes again. Then she hid from me her downcast face, as she replied, "If he wants me to be."

"Don't you know that he wants it?" said my father, almost laughing.

María blushed and was silent. The color did not leave her cheeks all that evening.

"You know that I want you to be my wife, don't you?" I said to her.

"Yes, I know it," she replied, in a faint voice.

"Now tell Efraín," said my father to her, quite gravely now, "the conditions upon which you and I make him this promise."

"On condition," said María, "that he goes cheerfully—as much so as he can."

"What other one, daughter?"

"The other is that he study hard, so as to come back soon—isn't it?"

"Yes," answered my father, kissing her forehead, "and also so as to deserve you. Other conditions you can settle. Well, do they please you?" he added, rising and turning to me.

I could not find words to reply. I closely pressed the hand he held out to me, as he said: "Good-bye till Monday, then. Remember my instructions, and read over the list many times."

My mother came up to us and embraced us, then she went out and left us alone. A long time must

have passed after my hand had taken María's, and our eyes had met, before she said: "How good papa is! Don't you think so?"

I nodded; my lips could not utter a syllable.

"Why do you not speak? Do you like the conditions he imposes upon you?"

"Yes, María. And what are yours?"

"Only one."

"Tell me."

"You know it."

"Yes, yes; but to-day you ought to tell me."

"That you always love me as you do now," she replied, and her hand pressed mine.

XXXVIII.

When I reached the farms the next morning, I found there the doctor who had taken Mayn's place in treating Feliciana. He told me that he had lost all hope of curing her, and said that a priest ought to be sent for.

I went into Feliciana's room. Juan Ángel was already there, astonished that his mother did not respond to his greeting. I could not fail to be affected by finding my old nurse in so desperate a condition. I gave orders that more of the slaves should be in attendance upon her, and had her carried into a more comfortable room, though she humbly opposed the change.

The priest came and administered the sacraments to the sick woman. Leaving the doctor at her side, I rode to the village to make arrangements for the burial, and to post that fateful letter to Señor A——.

Feliciana had a very bad night. The next day, Saturday, at three in the afternoon, the doctor came into my room, and said, "She will not live through the day."

He spoke the truth, for an hour after twilight she expired. As soon as the slaves had dressed her and put her in a coffin, covered from her throat down with white linen, she was placed upon a table draped with crape, and with tapers burning at the four corners. Juan Ángel stood at the head of the table, shedding tears upon his mother's forehead.

I ordered the overseer of the gang of slaves to bring them there for the evening prayer that night. They came in silently. The men and boys filled up the whole eastern corridor. The women kneeled in a circle about the coffin. As the windows of the death-chamber opened upon the corridor, both groups prayed at the same time.

After they had gone through the rosary, a female slave intoned the first stanza of one of those chants filled with grieving melancholy and irrepressible laments so familiar to the hearts of slaves. The whole company then repeated the stanza in chorus, the deep voices of the men harmonizing with the

clear and sweet tones of the women and boys. These are all the verses of that hymn which I can remember:

"In a dungeon dark,
Upon whose grating falls
No faintest gleam of sun
O'er black and lofty walls;
Where silence reigns profound
Save for my clanking chain;
No sound of whispering wind,
Nor beat of welcome rain—
I die far from thy hills,
O land beyond the wave!
Cradled beneath thy palms,
They will not shield my grave."

While they were singing, the candles around the coffin revealed the sparkling tears on the half-veiled faces of the women; and I in vain strove to keep back my own. The company withdrew, except a few women who remained to pray, in turns, all through the night, and two men to make ready the bier on which the corpse was to be carried to the village.

It was late at night before I could get Juan Ángel to try to sleep. Then I went to my room, but the murmur of the women's voices in prayer, and the sound of the *machetes* of the slaves who were making the bier, woke me every time I fell asleep. At four, Juan Ángel was not awake. With the eight slaves bearing the corpse, I set out. I had

ordered Higinio to have the boy wait for me in the house, as I wished to keep him from the hard trial of taking leave of his mother.

None of those who went spoke a single word all the way. The country-people who overtook us, as they were going to market with their produce, were astonished at our silence, as it is customary among the peasants of the country to give themselves up to disgusting orgies during what they call the watch-nights.

As soon as the prayers and mass for the dead were over, we went to the cemetery. The grave was ready. As we were going through the graveyard gate, Juan Ángel came up to us. He had escaped Higinio's vigilance, to run in search of his mother. When the coffin was placed at the edge of the grave, he threw himself upon it to prevent its being buried. I went up to him, wiped his tears, and said to him, gently: "It is not your mother that you see here. She is in heaven. God will not be pleased with your despair."

"She has left me alone! She has left me alone!" repeated the unhappy boy.

"No, no," I replied; "I am here; I love you and I always will. María, my mother, Emma, are left to you, and they will take your mother's place."

The coffin was lowered to the bottom of the grave. A slave threw in the first spadeful of earth. Juan Ángel rushed at him and seized the spade—an action that filled us all with distress.

We left a cross on Feliciana's grave, and at three in the afternoon of the same day her son and I set out for the upland farm.

XXXIX.

DESPITE what had happened the evening before my departure for the valley, María was just the same in her treatment of me as she had been before. The same chaste mystery still enveloped our love. We thought it almost taking a liberty to walk together alone in the garden. Forgetting at such times my journey, she would trip about, picking flowers, and bringing them in her apron to show to me, letting me choose the most beautiful ones for my room. I helped her sprinkle her favorite beds—an operation which involved her putting back her sleeves and showing her arms, though she did not perceive how I was admiring them. At other times she would eagerly try to make me see in the golden clouds of sunset, sleeping lions, gigantic horses, ruined castles of jasper and lapis lazuli, or whatever else she would delight to fancy in her childish enthusiasm.

One afternoon—beautiful afternoon which will always live in my memory!—the light of the fading glow of sunset, under a lilac-colored sky, was mingling with the rays of the rising moon—rays which were whitened like lamplight falling on an alabaster globe. The winds came frolicking down the mount-

ains to the plains. The birds hurriedly sought their nests in the grove. María was walking about the garden with me, clasping my arm with both hands; her curls, tossed by the breeze, more than once brushed my forehead. Her cheek was on my shoulder. We were silent. Suddenly she stopped at the end of a border of rose-bushes. She looked towards the window of my room. Then she turned her eyes to me and said: "It was here. I wore this very dress. Do you remember?"

"Always, María, always!" I replied, covering her hands with kisses.

"Just think! That night I awoke trembling, because I dreamed that you were doing—what you are doing now. Do you see this rose-bush just planted? If you forget me it will not blossom; but if you continue as you are, it will bear the most beautiful roses. I have promised them to the Virgin, and she will make me know if you are always good."

I smiled, touched by such simplicity.

"Don't you think it will be so?" she asked, gravely.

"I think that the Virgin will not need so many roses."

She led me up to my window. Once there, she disengaged her arm, went to the brook, a few steps away, knotting her scarf in her belt. Then she brought some water in the hollow of her two hands, and kneeled down to let it trickle over a sprouting bulb.

"It is a mountain lily," she said.

"And did you plant it here?"

"Because it was here—"

"I know it, but I hoped you had forgotten."

"Forgotten? What! is it so easy to forget?"

Her loosened hair swept down to the ground, and the wind threw some of her curls against the white musk-roses of a bush near her.

"But do you not know why it was you found the cluster of lilies here?"

"Of course I know. That was the day some one suspected I would put no more flowers on his table."

"Look at me, María."

"What for?" she replied, without raising her eyes from the bulb, which she seemed to be examining with the greatest interest.

"Every lily that blossoms here will be a cruel punishment for a single moment of distrust. Was I to suppose myself worthy? Come, let us plant your lilies far from this spot."

I was on one knee before her.

"No, Señor," she answered, disturbed, and covering the bulb with both hands.

I stood up again, and crossed my arms, waiting for her to finish what she was doing, or pretending to do. She tried to look at me so that I should not know it, and at last burst into a laugh. Her face was full of recompense for an instant of imagined harshness.

"So you are very angry?" she said. "Aren't you?

I am going to tell you, Señor, for what all the lilies that bloom here are destined."

As she endeavored to rise, taking the hand I offered her, she fell back again to her knees. Her hair was caught in the rose-bush. We loosened it, and as she threw back her head to arrange it, her glance had a fascination almost unknown to me before. Leaning on my arm, she said, "We must go; it is getting dark."

"What are the lilies destined for?" I asked, as we walked slowly towards the corridor.

"You already know what the new roses are for, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, the lilies are to be for something similar."

"Tell me what."

"Won't you be glad to find in every letter from me a bit of one of those lilies?"

"Ah, I see. Yes, indeed."

"That will be like saying many things to you which sometimes should not be written, and which it would be very hard for me to express. Besides, it is certain—"

"What is certain?"

"That we were both at fault."

"I do not want to go to the mountain to-morrow," she added, after a pause.

"But won't Tránsito be offended with you? It is a month since she was married, and we have not made her a single visit. Why don't you want to go?"

"Because—because nothing. You must tell her that we are very busy over your journey—or anything. Have her come with Lucía on Sunday."

"Very well. I shall come back very early."

"Yes; and there will be no hunting."

"Why, that is a new condition. Cárlos will laugh when he learns that you have imposed it on me."

"And who is going to tell him?"

"Perhaps I myself."

"And what would you do that for?"

"To console him for that fearful miss of his when he shot at the young deer."

"That's a fact. It is lucky it wasn't a jaguar."

"You don't know that Cárlos's rifle had no ball in it when he shot; Braulio had taken it out."

"And what did Braulio do that for?"

"For revenge. Cárlos and Señor M—— had made fun of José's dogs that morning."

"That was wrong in Braulio, wasn't it? Still, if he had not done it, the stag would not be alive now. You have not seen how glad he is when I go near him. Even Mayo has come to like him, and they often sleep together. He is so handsome! How his mother must have sorrowed for him!"

"You had better let him go, then."

"Is she still looking for him through the mountains?"

"Perhaps not."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because Braulio told me that the doe he killed,

a little afterwards, in the same ravine from which the young one came out, was no doubt the mother."

"Alas! what a man! Don't you ever kill a doe again."

We had reached the corridor. Juan ran out to meet María with open arms. She lifted him up, and disappeared with him. His sleepy head leaned on her flushed shoulder, which sometimes not even her scarf or hair ventured to hide.

XL.

I CAME down the mountain the next day at noon. Directly overhead was the sun, unshaded by a single cloud, and pouring its intense light on everything not sheltered from its fiery rays by the foliage of the trees. The groves were silent; there was not a breath of air to stir the leaves or start a bird. The tireless cicadas delighted in the summer's day given them in December. The valley and its surrounding mountains seemed to be lit up by the reflection of a gigantic mirror.

Juan Ángel and Mayo were with me. I perceived María going to the bath with Juan and Estefana. The dog ran towards them, leaping about the pretty group, barking and whining in his joy. María looked around for me eagerly, and at last saw me just as I leaped the garden wall. I went towards her. She was seated under the branches of the

orange-tree by the bath, upon a rug which Estefana had spread out.

"What heat!" she said. "You should have come back earlier."

"It was not possible."

"It almost never is. Would you like to bathe? I will wait."

"Oh no."

Juan, who had been shaking the clusters of oranges that were hanging within his reach and almost down to the ground, now kneeled in front of María to have her unbutton his blouse.

I brought that day a large supply of irises, since, besides those Tránsito and Lucía gave me, I found many on the way. I chose the finest ones for María, and threw all the others into the bath. She cried out: "Oh, what a pity! They are so pretty!"

"The Undines," I said, "do the same thing with them when they bathe in the river."

"Who are the Undines?"

"Some women who would like to resemble you."

"Resemble me? Where have you seen them?"

"In the river."

María laughed, and, as if to dismiss me, said, "I shall be only a little while."

Half an hour later she came into the parlor, where I was waiting for her. Her glance had that brilliance and her cheeks that faint glow that always gave her new beauty after the bath. Seeing me, she stopped and said, "Ah, why are you here?"

"Because I thought you would come."

"I came—because I thought you were waiting for me."

She sat down on the sofa, and broke in upon what she was thinking about, to say to me, "Why is it?"

"Why is what?"

"What always happens."

"You have not told me what."

"That if I imagine you are going to do a thing, you do it."

"And why did something tell me you were coming?"

"I have been wondering if, when you are not here any longer, you will be able to divine what I am doing, and I to know if you are thinking—"

"Of you?"

"That is what I meant. Come to mamma's sewing-room. I have done nothing to-day but wait for you, and she wants me to get through this afternoon with what I am sewing."

"Shall we be alone there?"

"Why are you suddenly so anxious for us to be always alone?"

"Everything which disturbs me—"

"Hush!" she said, putting a finger to her lips. "Don't you see? They are in the store-room. So those women," she added, seating herself, "are very beautiful. What are their names?"

"Ah, they are very beautiful."

"And they live in the mountains?"

"On the banks of the river."

"Exposed to sun and rain? Their complexion cannot be very good."

"Under the shade of great forests."

"What do they do there?"

"I do not know what they do. I do not meet them any more."

"How long since? Why don't they wait for you? Being so very lovely, it must cause you much sorrow."

"They are lovely; but you do not know what it is to be as they are."

"Then you must explain it to me. What are they? No, Señor," she added, hiding under the folds of the Irish linen upon her lap the hand I had tried to take.

"Very well."

"But I can't sew, and you haven't told me what those—what are their names?"

"I am going to confess it to you."

"Very well, do it."

"They are jealous of you."

"Angry with me?"

"Yes."

"With me?"

"Formerly I thought of no one but them; afterwards—"

"Afterwards?"

"Then I forgot them for you."

"In that case I am going to be very proud."

Her hand was now resting on the arm of my chair, and I knew I could take it.

She went on: "Are there Undines in Europe? Listen, my friend, are there any in Europe?"

"Yes."

"Then—who knows?"

"But I am sure that there they paint, and wear corsets and tight boots."

"Well, I know a person who is set distracted by a pair of pretty feet, and—oh, the flowers must be running out of the bath through the drain!"

"That means that I must go?"

"It would be a pity to lose them."

"It is something more than that."

"So it is. We should not be seen alone so often. Emma and mamma are coming."

XLI.

My father had determined to go to the city before my departure, not only because his business urgently demanded it, but also because he wished to make some arrangements there about my journey. On the fourteenth of January, the evening before the day of his starting, I had a part of my baggage carried to his room to go with his. My mother was packing the trunks, kneeling upon a rug, and Emma and María were helping her. Nothing was left to pack but some clothes of mine. María took up

some of them from a chair, and recognizing them, said, "These, too?"

My mother took them without a word, though she put her handkerchief to her eyes more than once while packing them. I went out, and as I was coming back with some papers which were to go, I found María leaning on the railing of the corridor.

"What is it?" I said. "Why are you crying?"

"I am not crying."

"Remember what you promised me."

"Yes, I do—to have courage for all this. If it were only possible for you to give me some of yours! But I have not promised you or mamma not to cry. If your face did not say more than these tears, I would conceal them. But, anyhow, no one will know it."

I wiped her cheeks with my handkerchief, and said: "Wait for me. I am coming back."

"Here?"

"Yes."

She was in the same spot. I leaned on the railing at her side.

"Look," she said, pointing to the dark valley—"look, how gloomy the nights have become. When the August evenings come back, where will you be?"

After silence for a few moments, she proceeded: "If you had not come at all—if, as papa's first plan was, you had not returned before going to Europe—"

"Would it have been better?"

"Better? Better? Have you ever thought so for a single moment?"

"You know well that I could not."

"But I have, once; the time I heard papa say that about the disease I had. And didn't you ever?"

"Never."

"Not even in those ten days?"

"I loved you then as I do now; but what the doctor and my father—"

"Yes; mamma told me. How can I ever repay you?"

"You have already—all that I could ask."

"Something worth as much as that?"

"Loving me as much as I loved you then—as much as I love you now."

"Yes, but that has not repaid you for what you did. Formerly," she continued, "I should have died of shame to speak like this to you. Perhaps it is not right now."

"Not right, María? Aren't you almost the same as my wife?"

"What, now? Already?"

"I cannot imagine how you will be and how I shall be then, but—"

"What are you looking for?" she asked, feeling my hands on hers.

"This," I replied, taking from the ring finger of her left hand a ring upon which the initials of her parents' names were engraved.

"For you to wear? I would have offered it to you if you wore rings."

"I will give it back to you the day of our marriage. Meanwhile, put this one in its place; it is one my mother gave me when I went to college. On the inside is your name and mine. It doesn't fit me, but it will you, won't it?"

"Perfectly. But this one I shall never give back to you. I remember that the day you went away you let it fall into the garden brook. I took off my shoes and stockings to find it for you, and as I got very wet, mamma was vexed."

Something dark as María's hair passed before our eyes. María gave a smothered cry, and covered her face with her hands.

"The black bird!" she exclaimed, in horror.

Trembling, she seized my arm. A thrill of fear ran through me. The hard rush of the wings could no longer be heard. María was motionless. My mother, alarmed at María's cry, came out of the study with a light.

"What is it?" she asked.

"That bird which we saw in Efraín's room."

The light trembled in my mother's hand, but she said:

"Why, child, why are you so frightened?"

"You do not understand—but I am over it now. Let us go away from here," she added, calling me with her eyes, now quite calm.

The bell rang in the dining-room, and we were

going in answer to it, when María went up to my mother, and said, "Don't tell papa about my fright, for he will laugh at me."

XLII.

At seven the next morning my father's luggage was already out of the house, and he and I were taking our coffee, dressed for the road. I was to go with him as far as the M——'s farm, to say good-bye to them and to other neighbors. The whole family was in the corridor when our horses were brought round. Emma and María, as I observed, came from my room. My father kissed my mother's cheek, and the forehead of María and Emma and of all the children down to Juan, who took occasion to remind him of a commission to buy a little saddle with pistol-holsters, desired for an orphan pony which was the boy's delight in those days.

My father stopped again in front of María before going down the stair-way, and said to her, in a low voice, laying a hand on her hair, and vainly trying to get her to look at him, "It is agreed that you are going to be very good and sensible, isn't it, my lady?"

María nodded affirmatively.

I said good-bye till afternoon, and as I was standing near María, she said to me, so that no one could hear her, "Not a minute after five."

Cárlos was the only one of Don Jerónimo's family at home. He received me with the greatest pleasure, and at once wanted me to agree to stay with him all day. We were smoking after breakfast, when Cárlos said to me: "It seems, then, that I shall be unable to see you before we say good-bye —you with your happy student's face, that face you used to put on to torture me when I would tell you of some desperate whim of Matilde's. But the fact is, if you are so sad at going, it proves that you would be happy to stay. Deuce take that journey, anyway!"

"You ought not to feel so badly," I said. "When I come back, you will have your doctoring free."

"Of course, my dear fellow. Do you think I hadn't considered that? Study hard, so as to come home soon. If I am not killed, meanwhile, by a fever caught on these plains, you may possibly find me in a dropsy. I am boring myself atrociously. They all wanted me to go to Buga to spend Christmas, and in order to stay at home, I had to pretend that I had sprained my ankle; though such conduct is likely to make me very unpopular with my numerous fair cousins. I shall finally have to invent some business in Bogotá — if only to bring back tanned skins and cloaks, the way Emigdio does. I'll bring something."

"A wife, for example," I broke in.

"What! do you suppose I haven't thought of that? A thousand times. Every night I make a hundred plans. Just imagine: in bed on my back

by six in the afternoon, waiting for the slaves to come to prayers, for them to call me to take chocolate, and then compelled to hear a jumble about grubbing roots, clearing grass-land, and cane-planting. Every morning, as soon as the first smell of crushed cane reaches my nose, my castles all tumble about my head."

"But you read?"

"What can I read? With whom can I talk about what I read? With that stupid overseer who is half asleep by five o'clock?"

"The only conclusion is that you are in desperate need of marrying—that you are thinking of Matilde again, and are scheming to bring her here."

"Literally correct. That is precisely the state of the case. As soon as I saw that I had been guilty of an egregious blunder in thinking of marrying your cousin—may God and she forgive me for it!—the temptation you speak of assaulted me. But do you know what usually happens to me? After costing me as much work as to solve one of Bacho's problems, to imagine that Matilde is actually my wife and in this house, it makes me laugh to think what will become of the poor creature."

"Why so?"

"Man! Matilde belongs to Bogotá as much as the fountain of San Cárlos, as much as the statue of Bolivar, as much as Escamilla, the porter. I should lose her in the transplanting. And what could I do to prevent it?"

"Why, make yourself love her forever; give her all the luxuries and amusements you can—in short, you are rich, and she will inspire you to work. Besides, these plains, these forests, these rivers—has she ever seen such things? Can they be seen without being loved?"

"There you go with your poetry. What about my father and his peasant ways? My aunts, with their absurd pride and hypocrisy? And this loneliness? and the heat? and the—the devil!"

"Hold on," I interrupted, laughing, "don't take it so much to heart."

"Let us talk no more of that. You must hurry back to cure me. When you do come back you are to marry the Señorita María, aren't you?"

"If God grants it."

"How would you like me to be your groomsman?"

"The best of all things."

"Thanks. It's agreed, then."

After a moment's silence, I said, "Have my horse ordered."

"Must you go already?"

"I am sorry, but they expect me home early. You see, my journey is so near at hand—and I must still go to-day to take leave of Emigdio and my *compadre* Custodio; they are not very near, you know."

"You are going on the thirtieth precisely?"

"Yes."

"You have only five days, then. I must not keep you. Well, you have laughed at something, if it was only at my being bored so."

Neither of us could conceal our sorrow at parting.

As I was fording the little Amaime, I heard some one calling me, and perceived Custodio coming out of the forest. He was riding a great yellowish colt not yet trained to the bit, seated on a saddle with an enormous pommel. He wore a blue striped shirt; his trousers were hitched up to his knees; and his long cloak hung down over his thighs. Behind him, mounted on a white mare bowed down by years and four great bunches of bananas, rode an idiot boy, the same one who discharged on the little farm the combined functions of swine-herd, bird-catcher, and gardener.

"God preserve you, little friend," said the old man, as he drew near. "If I had not shouted out so stubbornly, you would have got away from me."

"I was going to your house."

"You don't say so! As for me I haven't been out of these woods for quite a while, trying to run across that wretched cripple of a mule, who has cast her foal again; but she will have to pay me for them all together, crushing cane in the treadmill. If I had not thought of going out on the open ground of the pass to look for tracks, I should have been hunting for it yet. But I went straight out there, and no sooner said than done; there was the foal,

half eaten, and as big as if he were two months old. I couldn't even take off his hide, though I needed another one to make me some leggings, as the dogs won't have to wait much longer for the ones I have."

"Don't let that trouble you, old friend, for you are bound to have young mules in plenty, and years enough to see them. Let's go on, then."

"It's nothing, Señor," said he, beginning to ride on ahead of me. "Still it's all lost labor; the times are frightful. Just listen: honey down to a shilling; brown sugar, not worth talking about; the little sugar that comes out white, a dollar; cheese, given away; the pigs eating up the whole harvest of maize, and it might as well have been thrown into the river. What my wife can earn, though the poor creature works night and day, is not enough to buy candles: not a boiling of soap that pays expenses. What am I telling you? I bought of Master Don Jerónimo that bit of clearing. Oh, what a bargainer he is! Four hundred dollars and ten steers he took out of me!"

"And where did you make the four hundred? Out of the soap?"

"Ah, you misjudge me, friend. Why, we had to break open Salomé's money-box in order to pay him."

"Does Salomé work as hard as she used to?"

"If she didn't, where would she get her water to drink? She does needle-work which is a sight to

see, and helps in everything. Her mother's own daughter. But if I tell you that the girl is a puzzle to me, I am not lying to you."

"Salomé? She so proper, so honest?"

"She, my friend; quiet as you see her."

"What has happened?"

"You are a real gentleman and my friend, and I will tell you, instead of going to tell the priest in the church; that good saint would not suspect it if his soul left his body. But wait, and let me get over this ditch first, for it will take skill not to get stuck in it."

Turning around to the idiot, who came along half asleep among his bananas, he said, "Watch the path, fool; for if the mare gets mired I'll gladly lose the bananas for the sake of leaving you there."

The half-witted fellow laughed stupidly, and replied with some inarticulate mutterings. My friend went on, "You know Tiburcio, the little mulatto that Murcia raised?"

"Is not he the one that wanted to marry Salomé?"

"The very one."

"I do not know who raised him, but of course I know him. I have seen him in your house, and in José's. We have even hunted together several times. He is a fine lad."

"Up there where you see, he has eight good cows, his drove of pigs, his little bit of land, and two mares broken for riding. For 'ñor Murcia, though

he led a fearfully wicked life, was a good man and left everything to the boy."

"And what is the matter with Tiburcio?"

"I am coming to that. Well, Señor, it's as much as eight months ago that I began to notice that the boy had no lack of errands to come to see us. But I soon saw his game, and was sure that what he wanted was to see Salomé. One day I said so clearly to Candelaria, and she came out with the reply that my eyes must have been in a cloud, and that my story was stale. I put myself at a peep-hole, one Saturday afternoon, for Tiburcio always came on Saturdays at that hour; and mind you, I saw the girl go out to meet him as soon as she saw him. So I haven't a particle of doubt. Understand, I saw nothing improper. Day after day passed, and Tiburcio did not open his mouth to speak of marriage. But I thought: he is studying Salomé, and a ninny he will be if he doesn't marry her, for she is neat in her clothes, and a housewife such as you'll scarcely find. But suddenly Tiburcio stopped coming, and Candelaria could not find out the reason from the girl; and as Salomé has me in great respect, as she ought to, still less could I find it out. Anyhow, since some time before Christmas Tiburcio has not been there. Are you a friend of Justiniano, brother of Don Carlitos?"

"I haven't seen him since we were children."

"Well, cut off the whiskers Don Cárlos has grown, and there you have him. But would that he were

like his brother! He is the very devil. Still, a good-looking boy; what is the use of denying it? I do not know where he saw Salomé; but since he first did, I cannot eat a banana with any relish."

"That is not right."

"Though I am telling you this at the risk of having my wife, if she knows it, call me crazy, or a mere gabbler, I know what I am doing. But there is no disease without its cure. I have been digging over the matter till I have hit upon the difficulty."

"What is it, my friend? But tell me first—and pardon me if I offend you in asking it—how does Salomé treat Justiniano?"

"Don't ask me, Señor. That's the thing that keeps me day and night as if I were sleeping on nettles. My friend, the girl is smitten. I love her, my boy, and that's the reason I'm telling you all this, so that you can help me out."

"But how do you know that Salomé is enamoured?"

"Heaven help me! Haven't I seen her eyes dance when she sees the little white fellow? And she never fails to go Sunday afternoons to the house of old Dominga. Do you know her?"

"No."

"Well, I must tell you that she is one of those that use powders. No one can get it out of Candelaria's head that it was that bat who cast the evil-eye upon our monkey, the one that knew so much and used to amuse you so; for the poor little creature

gasped and beat his breast, groaning like a Christian."

"He must have eaten a scorpion, my friend."

"How could he? It was hard work to get him to take cold victuals. Make up your mind that the witch did him harm. But that is not what I was driving at. Once, when I went to look for my mare, I met the old woman. As I am very mischievous, as soon as I saw her I crossed her path and said, 'Look, 'ñ'a Dominga, turn back, for people there are busy instead of being gossips.' She trembled all over, and as I saw she was frightened I thought at once, the wretch is on a bad errand. She said one thing and another, but I left her as if she was at mass when I said, 'See, I am mischievous, and if I catch you in what you are about, I'll skin you; if I don't, let them take away my name.'"

My friend's excitement had reached a climax. Crossing himself, he continued: "By all that's holy, that creature will kill me some day, if I become really angry. It's fine doings, friend; a man to have a little daughter who has cost him so much sorrow, and then to have some one trying to make her hate the one that she best loves!"

My irascible friend was at the verge of a burst of tenderness, and I hastened to say to him, "Tell me the remedy you have found for the disease, for I can now see it is a serious thing."

"Well, now you'll see. Your mamma offered my wife the other day to have Salomé sent to her for

some weeks, so that the girl might learn fine needle-work. That is just what Candelaria wanted. But we couldn't do it then. I did not know you then as well as I do now."

"*Compadre!*"

"For the truth Christ died. But that's all past now. I wish your mamma would take the girl for some months. That scamp would not go down there to see her. Salomé will get back her wits, and will be the very one to tell that fellow to go and be hanged. Don't you think so?"

"Certainly. I will speak to my mother about it to-day. She and the girls will be much pleased. I promise you that all this shall be gotten over."

"May God reward you! Well, I'll manage it so that you can speak to Salomé a bit to-day, as if you meant nothing. You can propose to her to go to your house, and tell her your mamma wants her. You will tell me what you see, and so we will come out as straight as a furrow. But if the girl opposes me, I swear I'll tie her on one of my nags some fine day, and shut her up in the convent at Cali. Not so much as a fly can touch her there, and if she doesn't come out ready to be married, I'll keep her there till St. John crooks his finger."

We were riding through the clearing recently bought by Custodio, and he said: "Don't you see what good land it is, and how brown the underbrush is—the best sign of rich ground? The only thing lacking is water."

"Why, my friend, you can lead in all of that you want."

"Don't make fun of me. If I could, I wouldn't sell it for twice what I paid."

"My father will let you have all you want from our pastures. I told him what you needed, and he was surprised that you hadn't asked him before."

"How thoughtful you are, little friend! Think of your waiting till now to tell me! Tell the master that I thank him with all my soul. He knows I am not without a heart, and that I am at his orders, with all I have. Candelaria will be delighted; water handy for her garden, for the still, for the cow-yard. You know that what flows by the house is but a little thread, and that is muddied by my neighbor Rudecindo's pigs, which are all the while rooting and ruining my fences. The only clean water we can get in the house is by sending the stupid to the little Amaime to bring back gourdfuls on the mare. As for getting water from the Honda, it would be better to drink lye, it's so full of copperas."

"It comes from copper, my friend."

"I suppose so."

The news of my father's permission to take water so cheered the farmer that he made the big colt show his paces.

"Whose colt is that? He has not your brand."

"Do you like him? He belongs to Grandfather Somera."

"How much is he worth?"

"To tell you the plain truth, Don Emigdio would not give four *onzas*. Yes, he is a mere hack. You ought to see my dark bay—the one I have already trained to the bit. He has a beautiful gait. But what a job it was to break him! This arm was in a sling for a whole week. There never was a more touchy and obstinate beast. He is getting fat now, for after the last dressing down I gave him his spirit was broken."

We arrived at Custodio's house, and he dug his heels into the colt to make him open the court-yard gate. Scarcely had this closed behind us with a creak and a bang that startled the sorrel colt, when my friend said to me, "Be alert and careful with Salomé, to see what you can get out of her."

"Never fear," I replied, forcing my horse up to the corridor; he was frightened at the wash hanging there.

When I went to dismount, my friend had already covered the colt's head with his cloak, and was holding my stirrup and bridle. After fastening the horses, he went in, shouting, "Candelaria! Salomé!"

Nothing but the turkeys answered.

"What! not even the dogs," continued my friend; "has the earth swallowed them all?"

"I am coming," responded his wife from the kitchen.

"Stupidity! here's friend Efraín."

"Wait for me no time at all, little friend, for we

are running out some brown sugar, and it will burn."

"And Fermín, where has he hidden himself?" asked Custodio.

"He went with the dogs to look for the runaway pig," replied Salomé's pleasing voice. She soon appeared at the kitchen door, while her father was helping me off with my leggings.

The farmer's hut was thatched with straw. The floor was of hard earth, lately whitewashed, and very clean. As coffee-bushes, custard-apple trees, papaws, and other fruit-trees were all about the house, nothing was lacking but the thing which was to be supplied—clear, running water. The hut was furnished with chairs bottomed with undressed hide, a bench, a little table then covered with a cloth of mixed cotton and linen, and the dresser, where shone plates and porringers of various sizes and colors.

My plump and laughing *comadre* soon came out of the kitchen, glowing with the heat of the fire, and grasping a wooden ladle. After a thousand complaints at my not having come before, she said, "Salomé and I were looking for you to come to dinner."

"How was that?"

"Juan Ángel came here for a few *reales*' worth of eggs, and the Señora sent word that you were coming to-day. I had Salomé called from the river, where she was washing. Ask her what I said to her, to make sure I am not lying to you: 'If my

friend does not come to dinner here to-day, I will tell him what I think of him.' "

"That must mean you have a feast ready for me."

"Haven't I seen you eat one of my stews with a relish? The only trouble is it isn't done yet."

"All the better; I shall have time to go and take a bath. Now, Salomé," I said, stopping at the kitchen door, while the others went into the sitting-room, "what have you got for me?"

"Jelly, and what I am making here," she replied, without stopping her grinding. "If you knew how I have been waiting for you as for the consecrated bread—"

"That must be because—there must be many fine things."

"Only a bit. Wait for me just no time at all till I wash myself, so as to shake hands with you. I know it will be useless, for, as you are not my friend any more—"

She said this without looking at me directly, half ashamed and half pleased, but showing me her smiling mouth with its teeth of incomparable whiteness. As her soft, bare arms came and went over the stone upon which she was leaning her waist, her flexible figure showed to the best advantage, her loosened hair fell over her shoulders, and the folds of her white embroidered chemise rose and fell. Throwing back her head to shake her shoulders free of hair, she went to wash her hands, and after drying

them on her skirt, said to me: "It seems you like to see grinding. If you knew," she went on, "the trouble I have. Didn't I tell you that I have been waiting for you to come?"

Standing so that she could not be seen from the outside, she gave me her hand, and continued: "If you had not stayed away a whole month, you could have helped me. Look and see if my papa is out there."

"No one is there. And can't I give you the same help now?"

"I'm afraid not now."

"But tell me, and I'll see. Don't you know that I would help you with all my heart?"

"If I should say no, I should not tell the truth; for I have long known that you liked me."

"I am delighted that you know that."

"But what I have to tell you is such a very long story that I can't do it right away; and it is a miracle that mamma is not here already. Listen, there she comes!"

"There will be another chance."

"Oh, I hope so. I can't bear to have you go away without my telling you."

"So you are going to take a bath?" said Candelaria, as she came in. "Then I am going to send you a sheet, beautifully perfumed, and you can go right away with Salomé and your godson."

On hearing this suggestion of the good woman, I concluded that she had fully entered into her hus-

band's plan. Salomé made me an expressive little grimace, as much as to say, "Now's our chance."

I left the kitchen, and walked up and down in the sitting-room while they were getting the things ready for my bath. I thought, meanwhile, that Custodio had reason enough to be jealous of his daughter, since one less suspicious than he might have seen that there was danger in Salomé's face, rounded figure, and graceful walk.

My reflections were interrupted by Salomé herself, who stopped at the door with a little straw hat half put on, and said, "Shall we go?"

She added, holding out the sheet she carried over her shoulder, "What perfume is that?"

"The one you use."

"It's mallows, Señor."

"Oh, mallows, is it?"

"I always have them in my box. Walk on, and don't think it is far. We've only to go down through the cacao-plantation, and once on the other side, there's but a bit to go and we're there."

Fermín, loaded down with gourds, walked in front of us. He was my godson. I was thirteen and he two when I served as godfather at his confirmation. I did it in recognition of the regard which his parents had always shown me.

XLIII.

We were going out of the court-yard behind the kitchen when Candelaria called after us, "You must not be long, for the dinner will be ready in a minute."

Salomé was going to shut the little cross-barred gate behind us, as we entered the cacao-enclosure; but I hastened to do it, while she was saying: "What shall we do with Fermín? He is such a little gossip."

"You attend to that."

"Oh, I know. Wait till we get a little farther on, and I'll get rid of him."

The thick shade of the cacao-trees covered us. The plantation appeared to be limitless. Salomé's feet, which her blue chintz skirt left visible to the ankles, showed prettily against the black path and the dry leaves. My godson walked behind us, throwing corn-cobs and aguacate stones at the *cucaracheros* and at the turtle-doves which were cooing under the leaves. As we reached the foot of a *cachimbo*, Salomé paused, and said to her brother: "Suppose the cows should go and dirty the water. I'm sure they will, because they are always at this time in their drinking-place up the stream. There's nothing for

it but your running and driving them away. Run, my life, and see to it that they don't go and eat the gourd which I forgot and left in the fork of the *chiminango*. But be careful not to break the gourds, or lose anything. Off you go."

Fermín did not wait for the order to be repeated. It must be said that it was given in the sweetest and most insinuating manner.

"Don't you see how I did it?" asked Salomé, slowing her walk, and looking at the branches in badly feigned indifference. Then she began to look at her feet, as if to count her slow steps. I broke the silence by saying to her, "Now tell me what it is that gives you so much trouble."

"You see it makes me feel—I don't know how to tell you."

"Why so?"

"It is because they act so sad and serious with me to-day."

"That's all your imagination. But begin, for you can't do it afterwards. Besides, I have something very nice to tell you."

"Is that so? You begin, then."

"By no means," I replied.

"Must it be, then? Well, listen. But promise me never to tell a single thing of what—"

"Of course."

"Well, what has happened is that Tiburcio has turned out the most fickle and unthankful person, and goes around doing nonsensical things to make

me sorry. We have been quarrelling for almost a month, and he has not the least reason."

"No reason at all? Are you sure?"

"Look, I swear it."

"And what does he say is the matter with him to treat you so after having loved you so much?"

"Tiburcio? Impudent fellow! He does not love me a bit. At first, I could not understand why he acted so disagreeably all the while, but afterwards I found out that it was because he had an idea that I was making a pretty face at every one I saw. Tell me, can one endure that, an honest woman? He made that stupid mistake in the first place, and then you joined the dance."

"What, I?"

"Just when he was going to speak!"

"Why, what did he think?"

"What is the use of my telling you when you can guess already? It was all because he saw you come to the house several times, and because I am fond of you. It was natural that he should be suspicious, wasn't it?"

"But finally he saw it was all nonsense, I suppose?"

"Oh, it cost me tears and fine words to make him reasonable again!"

"Really, I am sorry to have been the cause of this."

"Never mind that. If it had not been you, it would have been another. Listen, I have not told

you the best. My papa was breaking some colts for that boy Justiniano, and he had to come, besides, to see some steers he had in training. Once when he was here, Tiburcio met him."

"Here?"

"Don't be silly. In the house. As a punishment for my sins, he met him once again."

"That makes twice, Salomé."

"Would that had been all! He also met him one Sunday afternoon when he came to ask a drink of water."

"That makes three."

"That is all, for, although he has come other times, Tiburcio did not see him. Still, I believe that they have told him."

"And to you does this seem a mere nothing?"

"Are you, too, going to say the same thing? Oh, dear! Is it my fault that the boy keeps on coming? Why does not my papa tell him never to come again?"

"There are some very simple things hard to do."

"There! that's exactly what I told Tiburcio. But there is a remedy for everything, and of that I hardly dare speak to you."

"He must marry you quickly—isn't that it?"

"If he loves me so much. But he already—and he could think me a woman of that kind!"

Her eyes were moist, and after a few more steps she stopped to dry her tears.

"Don't cry," I said. "I am sure he doesn't be-

lieve that. It is all the result of jealousy. You must try to overcome it."

"Don't you believe that. He ought not to be so proud. Because they have told him he is a gentleman's son, no one comes up to the ankle of the vain fellow, and he thinks there's no one like him. I should be very happy if 'ñor José would turn him off. He is so provoking!"

"You must not be unfair. What is it against him that he works for José? That simply means he is making good use of his time. It would be worse if he passed all his days in idleness."

"Oh, I know what Tiburcio is. He ought not to be so much in love."

"But, because he admires you, must he admire every woman he sees?"

"Of course."

I laughed at her reply, and she turned her eyes upon me to say, "Well, what tickles you in that?"

"Why, don't you see that you are treating Tiburcio exactly as he treats you?"

"Heaven help me! no. How do I treat him?"

"Why, you are jealous of him."

"Not at all. Never that."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, if he made me? No one will ever make me believe that, if 'ñor José would consent, this changeable fellow would not marry Lucía, and, if Tránsito were not now out of the question, both of them, if they would let him."

"Why, I must tell you that Lucía has long loved Braulio's brother, who is soon coming for her. There is no doubt about it, for Tránsito told me."

Salomé was plunged in thought. We reached the end of the cacao-plantation. She sat down upon a fallen tree, and said: "Well, tell me. What do you think is to be done?"

"Will you let me tell Tiburcio what we have been talking about?"

"No, no. By what you love most, don't do that."

"I only ask if you will consent."

"All of it?"

"Only your complaints, without your reproaches."

"Every time I remember what he thinks me to be, I do not know what I am saying. See, I think it is better not to tell him; for if he does not love me any more, he will go around saying that I wore myself out crying for him, and tried in all ways to please him."

"Make up your mind, then, Salomé, that there is no way of getting over your trouble."

"Oh dear!" she exclaimed, beginning to cry.

"Come, don't be a coward," I said, taking her hands away from her face. "Tears from your eyes are worth too much for you to shed them so copiously."

"If Tiburcio thought so, I would not spend the nights weeping till I fall asleep, to see him so unkind, and to think that on his account my papa is angry with me."

"What will you bet that Tiburcio will not come to see you to-morrow, and make it all up?"

"Oh, I admit that I should never be able to pay you," she replied, taking my hand in hers and pressing it to her cheek. "Do you promise it to me?"

"I will bring it about unless I am very stupid or unfortunate."

"Mind, I depend upon your word. But, on your life, don't tell Tiburcio that we have been here so entirely alone and—for then he would go back to the other thing, and that would be to spoil everything. Now," she added, beginning to climb the fence, "leap over so as not to see me jump,—or we will jump together."

"You are very particular. You were not so much so formerly."

"I am getting more bashful every day. Climb up, then."

But Salomé found more difficulty in getting to the other side than I did, and remained seated upon the fence, while she said to me, "I can't get down without leaping."

"Let me help you. See, it's getting late, and my *comadre*—"

"Do you think she is like him? Even if she is, how do you expect me to get down? Don't you see that if I trip—"

"Stop your monkey tricks and lean on me," I said, offering her my shoulder.

"Straighten up, then, for I weigh as much as—a

feather," she added, leaping down lightly. "I ought to have great glory for that, for I know many ladies who would like to be able to leap a fence like that."

"You are a very artless creature."

"Is that the same thing as spiteful? Because, if it is, I am going to pick a bone with you."

"Going to what?"

"Don't you understand that? Why, be angry with you. What can I do to find out how you appear when you are very angry? I'd like to know."

"Suppose you were not able, afterwards, to mollify me?"

"Let me alone for that! Haven't I seen how your heart is soft as butter if you see me crying?"

"But that is only when I see that you are not doing it out of coquetry."

"Don't do it out of what? What's that word?"

"Co-quet-ry."

"What does it mean? Tell me, I really don't know—only I suppose it must be something bad. In that case I'll be on my guard against it, do you hear?"

"Excellent! But you are throwing it away."

"Tell me, tell me! I won't stir if you don't."

"I will go on alone," I replied, taking a few steps.

"Goodness! I am capable of spoiling the water for you. And what sheet will you dry yourself on, I'd like to know? I don't mean it; do tell me what I am throwing away. I am beginning to think it is—"

"Well?"

"Is it, can it be, love?"

"Exactly so."

"But how am I to help it? Why do I love that stuck-up fellow? If I were white, now, very white; and rich, oh, very rich, why—then I would love you, wouldn't I?"

"Do you think so? What should we do with Tiburcio?"

"With Tiburcio? Oh, out of friendliness, and in order to give a lift to everybody, we would make him overseer, and keep him like this," she said, doubling up her hand.

"I shouldn't like the plan.'

"Why not? Wouldn't you like to have me love you?"

"It isn't that; but fate has reserved you for Tiburcio."

Salomé laughed in perfect good-humor. We had reached the little stream. She spread out the sheet upon the turf, and then kneeled down upon a stone to wash her face. When she was done, she took a handkerchief from her belt to dry herself. I offered her the sheet, saying, "That will do you harm, unless you take a bath."

"Perhaps I'll come back to bathe; the water is so warm. But do you refresh yourself a while. As soon as Fermín comes, and when you are done, I'll give myself a ducking in the pool below."

Standing up now, she continued to look at me, smiling mischievously as she passed her moist hands

over her hair. At last she said, "Will you believe me when I say that I have dreamed that what I said just now was true?"

"What, that Tiburcio didn't love you any more?"

"Contrary! That I was white. When I awoke, it was an awful disappointment—a disappointment so great that the other Sunday, in the parish church, I could think of nothing but my dream all through mass. And the whole week, sitting where you are now, doing my washing, I complained about it."

Her simple confidences were broken in upon by shouts of "*chi-ino, chi-i-ino,*" uttered by her father, off by the cacao-plantation, as he was calling the pigs. Salomé was startled a little, and said, looking around: "That Fermín has turned into smoke. Well, have your bath, quick. I will go up the river to look for him. Perhaps he went off without waiting for us."

"Wait for him here; he will come to look for you. This is all because you heard your father. Do you suppose that he doesn't like us to talk together?"

"Talk together, yes, but—that depends."

Leaping over the large stones on the bank with the greatest agility, she disappeared behind the leafy *carboneros.*

Her father's cries continued, and made me think that his confidence in me had its limits. Doubtless he had followed us from afar, and only when he lost sight of us determined to call the swine. Custodio did not know that his suggestion had been carried out most diplomatically, and that, to the thousand

charms of his daughter, no soul could be more blind and deaf than mine.

I went back to the house with Salomé and Fermín, who were loaded with gourds. She had made a bundle of hers in her handkerchief, and above it bore on her head the rustic jar, which, though unsupported by her hand, did not prevent her graceful form from displaying all its lithe ease of movement.

As soon as Salomé leaped down, as before, she thanked me with a "God reward you," and her pleasantest smile, adding: "It was in payment for this that I was by the side of the river, up the stream, throwing flowers in for your bath. Didn't you see them?"

"Yes, but I thought it was a troop of monkeys up there."

"How stupid of you! And I almost had a fall climbing the tree for the blossoms."

"And are you so foolish as to believe that I did not know it was you who threw the flowers in?"

"Well, Juan Ángel told me that at the farm they throw roses into the tank when you take a bath, and I thought I would throw into the river the best flowers I could find."

At four in the afternoon came my prolonged leave-taking. My *comadre* made me many promises of recommending me to the *milagroso* of Buga, to secure me a pleasant journey and speedy return. As I said good-bye to Salomé, who managed just then to be away from the others, she pressed my

hand warmly, and said: "Remember, I depend upon you. Don't say good-bye to me for your stupid journey; for, even if it uses me up, I am coming out to the road to see you, should it be only after you have passed by. Don't forget me—you know if you do, I don't know what to do with my papa."

Over on the other side of one of the torrents that run noisily down the slope, between the swelling forest-knolls, I heard a man's full voice singing:

"Of Time I ask more time,
And Time time giveth me;
Yet Time himself doth say,
My dreams dispelled shall be."

The singer came out of the woods. It was Tiburcio. With his cloak hanging over one shoulder, and across the other a staff from the end of which hung a little bundle, he was holding on his way, unbosoming his grief to solitude. He was silent, and stopped on seeing me. After a pleasant and respectful greeting, he came nearer and said: "*Caramba!* You are going up late and at a pace, when the black sweats like that! Where do you come from, swallowing the wind in this way?"

"I have been making some calls. The last one, as your good-luck would have it, was at Salomé's house."

"It's a dog's age since you were there."

"I'm very sorry for that. And you, how long is it since you were there?"

The young man hung his head, and began to whip

a little bush with his stick. At last he looked up at me and said: "It was her fault. What did she tell you?"

"That you are ungrateful and jealous, and that she is dying for you. That's all."

"Did she tell you all that? Then she kept back the best."

"What is it you call the best?"

"The fine times she has with that boy—Justiniano."

"Listen to me. Do you think that I could be in love with Salomé?"

"How could I think that?"

"Well, Salomé is as much in love with Justiniano as I am with her. You must judge that girl at her true worth, which, luckily for you, is great. You have offended her with your jealousy; yet if you go and try to please her, she will forgive you, and love you more than ever."

Tiburcio stood reflecting. Then he said, with a certain tone and air of sadness: "Look, my boy Efraín, I love her so much that she cannot imagine the torture she has caused me this month. When a man has the disposition which God has given me, he can endure everything except being taken for a simpleton. I know what I am saying: the fault is Salomé's."

"What you do not know is, that to-day, when she was telling me of your unkindness, she was in a desperate way, and cried pitifully."

"Really?"

"And I inferred that you were the cause of it all. If you love her as you say you do, why don't you marry her? Once in your own house, who could see her without your consent?"

"I confess that I have thought of marrying, but I cannot make up my mind. In the first place, because Salomé always thinks I am suspicious; and in the second, I do not know if 'ñor Custodio would give her to me."

"Well, as concerns her, you know now what I have told you. As for her father, I'll answer for him. You must act reasonably. In proof that you believe me, you must go this very afternoon to Salomé's house, and without appearing to know what has taken place, make her a call."

"*Caramba!* what a hurry you are in! So you will answer for everything?"

"I know that Salomé is the purest, prettiest, and smartest girl you can find; and as for her parents, I know that they will give her to you gladly."

"I declare, you give me a mind to go."

"If you don't go, and Salomé should dismiss you, and so you should lose her, you will have no one to blame but yourself."

"I'll go, master."

"That's settled, then. It is useless for me to ask you to inform me how it goes with you, for I am certain that you will be very much obliged to me. Good-bye; it's almost five."

"Good-bye, my master. God reward you. I will certainly tell you what happens."

"Be careful not to go singing those verses where Salomé can hear you."

Tiburcio laughed and then replied: "Do they seem to you offensive? Good-afternoon. Depend upon me."

XLIV.

The parlor clock was striking five. My mother and Emma were waiting for me in the corridor. María was seated on the bottom steps of the staircase. She wore that green dress which contrasted so beautifully with her dark hair. Juan was lying in her lap half asleep. She rose as I dismounted. The child begged for a little ride on my horse, and María brought him in her arms, and helped me place him on the saddle-holsters. Said she: "It's just five. How prompt you are! If you only were so always!"

"What have you done to-day with your Mimiya?" I asked Juan, as soon as we were a little away from the house.

"She is the one who has been bad to-day," he replied.

"How's that?"

"Why, crying."

"Ah! Why didn't you amuse her?"

"She wouldn't let me, though I was good to her, and brought her flowers. But I told mamma."

"And what did she do?"

"She kissed her and made her feel better, because Mimiya loves mamma more than me. She has been bad, but don't say so to her."

María took Juan as I brought him back.

"Have you watered the plants to-day?" I asked her, as I was going up the stairs.

"No; I was waiting for you. Talk to mamma and Emma a little while," she added, in a low voice, "and as soon as it is time, I will go to the garden."

She was always afraid lest my mother and sister might think that she had weakened my affection for them, and tried to make up to them the loss of a part of my love by showing them still more of her own.

María and I had just watered the flowers. Seated on a stone bench, with the brook almost at our feet, we were hidden by a mass of jasmines from all eyes except Juan's. He was singing away in his usual fashion, and was wholly absorbed in setting afloat captured beetles and grasshoppers on dry leaves and passion-flower calyxes.

The sun was setting behind the Mulaló mountains, half hidden by clouds hanging about it like fillets of gold, and its lurid rays sported with the long shadows of the willows, whose green summits the wind was caressing.

We had talked of Cárlos and his whimsicalities, and of my visit to Salomé. María's lips wore a sad smile.

"Look at me," I said to her.

Her glance had something of that languor which I had noticed in it on the nights when she was watching by my father's bed.

"Juan told me the truth," I added.

"What has he told you?"

"That you have been bad to-day—don't call him —that you have cried, and that he could not comfort you. Is that true?"

"Yes. When you and papa were riding away this morning, it occurred to me that perhaps you were deceiving me, and that you would not come back. I went to your room, and then I saw it could not be so, there were so many of your things which you could not leave. After you had gone out of sight, everything seemed so sad and silent that I more than ever dreaded that day which is coming—which is coming without our being able to prevent it. What shall I do? Tell me, tell me what I must do to make those years go by. You will not be looking upon all this. Absorbed in your studies, seeing new countries, you will be able to forget, hours together. But I shall not be able to forget at all. You leave me here. I shall die of remembering and waiting."

She laid her hand upon my shoulder, and let her head rest upon it for an instant.

"Don't talk in that way, María," I said to her, in a choking voice, stroking her pale forehead with my unsteady hand; "don't talk so. You will extinguish what little courage I have left."

"Ah, you have some courage still, but it is days since I lost all mine. I have been able to agree to everything," she went on, hiding her face in her handkerchief. "I have succeeded in concealing within myself the dread and anguish I feel, because at your side all this is changed into something which I suppose is happiness. But you are going away, and I shall remain alone. I cannot be again as I was before. Alas! why did you ever come?"

Her last words wrung my heart, and I covered my face with my hands.

"Efraín," said she, in the tenderest voice, after a few minutes, "Efraín, look; I am not crying now."

"María," I replied, lifting my face, in which she must have seen something strange and solemn, so fixedly did she look at me, "do not blame me for coming back. Blame the one who made you the companion of my boyhood, the one who wished me to love you as I do; complain, then, that you are what you are—blame God. What have I asked of you, what have you given me, that could not be asked and given in His presence?"

"Nothing, nothing. Why do you ask me? I do not blame you. Oh, how could I? I will not complain any more."

"Haven't you just done it once for all?"

"No, no; what did I say to you? I am only a silly girl, and do not know what I say. Look at me. Do not be angry with me for my silliness. I shall

be brave now. I shall be equal to everything. I will not complain of anything."

I drew her head to my shoulder again, and she added:

"I will never say that to you again. You have never been offended with me."

As I dried her last tears, my lips for the first time touched the hair fringing her face. She put up her hands as if to prevent my lips from touching her forehead. It was needless. I did not dare to let them.

XLV.

On the 28th of January, two days before my journey, I went up the mountain very early. José and the girls had sent Braulio to bring me. They wanted me to say good-bye to them in their own house. When we arrived, Tránsito and Lucia were milking the cow, Mariposa, in the little court-yard of Braulio's cabin. They sprang up to greet me with their usual pleasure, and to invite me in.

"First finish milking the heifer," I said, leaning my rifle against the palings; "but Lucía and I will do it alone, and that will make her think of me every morning."

I took the large gourd, on the bottom of which snowy foam already lay, and holding it under Mariposa's udder, at last succeeded in getting Lucía, in great embarrassment, to milk it full. While

she was doing this, I said to her, under the cow: "José's nephews are not all gone yet. I know that Braulio has a brother, a finer fellow than he is, even, and that he has loved you ever since you were no bigger than a doll."

"No such thing," she broke in.

"Oh yes, he has. I am going to tell Señora Luisa that she must have her husband bring his nephew to help you. And then, when I come back, you won't be blushing at everything."

She laughed, and stopped milking.

"Aren't you going to finish?"

"But how can I, when you are so troublesome? There, there isn't any more."

"Why, there are two full teats. Milk them."

"No, they are for the calf."

"Well, shall I tell Luisa?"

She left off biting her lip, and made a gesture which meant, "Do what you like."

The calf was in a desperate state till they took off his muzzle, and then was at the cow's flanks in an instant. As Lucía saw him pushing at the udder, she said, "That is what you wanted—you great-headed, particular thing!"

Then she went into the house, carrying the gourd on her head, and looking at me askance in the most piquant way.

I drove away a family of geese from the bank of the brook, where they were dreaming on the turf, and set about making my morning toilet. I con-

versed meanwhile with Braulio and Tránsito, who held my coat and vest.

"Lucía!" called Tránsito, "bring the embroidered towel—the one in the little painted box."

"You need not think she will come," I said; and I told them of what I had said to Lucía.

They laughed as Lucía came running out with the towel, in spite of our thinking she would not. She guessed what had passed, and that we were laughing at her. She handed me the towel, turning her face away so that I should not see it. Then she said to Tránsito, "Come and look after your coffee, or it will burn, and don't stand there giggling."

"Is it all ready?" asked Tránsito.

"Hours ago!"

"What is this about the coffee?" I asked.

"Why, I asked the Señorita, the last time I was there, to show me how to make it, for I thought you didn't like our chocolate. That's the reason you found us in such a hurry with the milking."

In the house, simplicity, cleanliness, and good order were on every hand. Everything smelled of cedar—the wood of which the homely furniture was made. Señora Luisa had adorned her daughter's cabin with bunches of pinks and narcissuses. By the door hung deer-heads, and deer-feet served for clothes-hooks in the sitting-room and bedroom.

Tránsito, half proud and half afraid, offered me a cup of coffee, the first trial after María's lessons. It

was a most successful trial, for as soon as I tasted the coffee I saw that it rivalled that so skilfully prepared by Juan Ángel.

Braulio and I went to summon José and Señora Luisa to breakfast. We all breakfasted together in the kitchen, Tránsito, alert and smiling, playing her part as mistress of the house. Lucía threatened me with her eyes every time I let her see me looking at her father. With instinctive delicacy, these country-people made no allusion to my journey, as if not wishing to embitter those last hours together.

It was eleven o'clock. José, Braulio, and I had visited the new banana-orchard, the clearing he was making, and the tasselled cornfield; when all were together in the house again, we remained silent. There must have been something in my face which affected them, since they averted their gaze. At last, with an effort, I rose. I took my rifle, and hung it on one of the hooks in the little room. I said to Braulio, "Whenever you make a good shot with that, think of me."

The mountaineer could not find words to thank me.

Señora Luisa, still seated, made no attempt to conceal her tears. Tránsito and Lucía, standing on either side of the door, turned their backs to me. Braulio was pale. José pretended to be looking for something in the corner where the tools were.

"Well, Señora Luisa," I said, leaning forward

to embrace her, "good-bye. Pray for me a great deal."

She sobbed without answering.

At the threshold I caught the heads of both the girls to my breast in a single embrace. They were sobbing, and their hair was wet with tears of my own. Braulio and José were waiting for me outside.

"I am coming to-morrow," said José, taking my hand.

We both knew very well that he would not come. As soon as I had loosed myself from Braulio's arms his uncle caught me in his; then, wiping his eyes on his shirt-sleeve, he took the path for the clearing. At the same time, I started off in the opposite direction, followed by Mayo, having signed to Braulio not to go with me.

XLVI.

I WENT down slowly towards the bottom of the mountain gorge. Only the distant cry of the *gurríes*, and the murmur of the river disturbed the silence of the woods. My heart was saying farewell to each spot—to each tree by the path, to each brook I crossed.

Seated on the river's bank, I thought of those good souls who had shed tears at my departure. My own fell to mingle with the fleeing waters—fleeing from me like the happy days of those six months.

In half an hour I reached the house, and went to my mother's sewing-room. Only she and Emma were there; more than an hour passed before I asked for María.

"We were with her in the oratory," said Emma. "She went to the store-room afterwards. She cannot know that you have come back."

It had never happened before that I should return to the house and not see María within a few minutes. I was much afraid that she had fallen again into that dejection which so discouraged me; yet I had seen her making incessant efforts to overcome it during the past week.

An hour afterwards, Juan knocked at my door to call me to dinner. As I went out I found María leaning against the grated window of the sewing-room.

"Mamma didn't call you," said the laughing boy.

"Who taught you to tell falsehoods, then?" I replied; "María will not forgive you for that."

"She was the one who sent me to do it," said Juan, pointing at her.

I turned to María to see if it were true. I did not need to ask her; her smile confessed it. Her bright eyes expressed the old peaceful happiness which our love had taken from them. Upon her cheeks was the quick blush which used to beautify them in our childish sports. She wore a white dress, and her braids fell in waves over the graceful skirt at the slightest movement she made.

"Why are you so sad and secluded?" she asked me. "I have not been so to-day."

"I am not sure of that," I replied, so as to have a pretext for going up close to look at her through the grating between us.

She lowered her eyes, pretending to tie over again the strings of her blue silk apron. Then she crossed her hands behind her back, and leaned against one of the window-shutters, saying, "Isn't it true?"

"I doubted it, but since you have succeeded in deceiving me—"

"Deceiving you, indeed! Is it a good thing for you to go and shut yourself up, when you are going away after one night more?"

"I am glad to see you so courageous. And is it a good thing for me not to be able to see you for two hours after coming home?"

"What sort of an hour is twelve for coming down the mountain? Besides, I have been very busy. I saw you, though, as you were coming down. To prove it, you did not have your rifle, and Mayo was lagging far behind."

"So you have been very busy. What have you been doing?"

"Oh, everything. Something good, and something bad."

"Tell me what."

"I have prayed a good deal."

"Emma told me that already; what else have you done?"

"The bad thing?"

"Yes, the bad thing."

"Will you go to pray with me to-night if I tell you?"

"Yes."

"But you must not tell mamma; she will be angry."

"I promise not to tell her."

"I have been ironing."

"You?"

"Of course, I."

"But how did you manage it?"

"Without mamma's knowing it."

"But why do you need to roughen your hands with such work?"

"Ah! I wanted you to take away your finest shirts ironed by me. Aren't you glad? Don't you thank me?"

"But who taught you to iron? How in the world did you think of doing it?"

"One day when Juan Ángel brought back some shirts, saying that his master did not like them, I told Marcelina that I would help her to do them better."

"I thank you a thousand times for all your pains. I never imagined that you had strength enough to manage an iron."

"If you take a very small one, and carefully wrap up the handle in a handkerchief, it cannot hurt your hands."

"Let me see yours."

"Why, they are perfectly right."

"Show them to me."

"They are just as they always are."

"I doubt it."

"Look at them."

I took them in mine, and stroked the palms, soft as satin.

"Is anything wrong with them?" she asked.

"As mine are rough—"

"They don't feel so to me. What did you do on the mountain?"

"I suffered a great deal. I never thought they would feel so sorry about my going, nor that it would grieve me so sincerely to say good-bye to them—especially to Braulio and the girls."

"What did they say?"

"Poor things! They couldn't say anything, they cried so. But don't you feel sad. I should not have told you of this. Let me remember you in our last hours together, as you were to-day, cheerful, almost happy."

"Yes," she said, wiping her eyes, "I want to be like that. To-morrow! Only one more day! But it will be Sunday, and we shall be together all day. We will read together. And you must tell me how you most like to see me dressed."

"Just as you are now."

"Very well. There they come to call us to dinner. Good-bye."

She used to take leave of me in that way, although we were to be together afterwards; for it seemed to her, as it did to me, that when we were with all the family we were separated from each other.

XLVII.

At eleven o'clock in the evening of the twenty-ninth I took leave of the family and María in the parlor. I sat up in my room until I heard the clock strike one—the first hour of the dreaded day at last arrived; I did not want it to find me sleeping. Without undressing, I lay down on my bed at the stroke of two. María's handkerchief, fragrant with the perfume which she always used, crumpled by her hands, and moistened by her tears, was on my pillow.

Two or three times I fell asleep, but awoke in nervous agitation. I tried to woo back the disturbed sleep, for asleep I should again see her radiantly beautiful as on the first days after my return; thoughtful and silent, as she was when I first declared to her my affection. Again I should hear her low and trembling voice confiding to me the secret of her most pure love. Again I should see her eyes, less timid at last, revealing to me all her soul, while they read mine. I slept again. The sound of a sob awakened me. It was the one which had escaped from her that night as we parted.

It was not yet five, when, after taking pains to conceal the traces of my sleeplessness, I began walking in the dim corridor. Very soon I saw the gleam of a light in María's room, and heard Juan's voice calling her.

The first rays of the rising sun vainly tried to break through the thick fog which hung like a great veil from the mountain peaks, and floated far out on the distant plains. The western summits were clear and blue; against them the churches of Cali showed golden, while, farther down, the little villages of Yumbo and Vijes whitened against the slopes like flocks of sheep.

Juan Ángel brought me my coffee, and saddled my black horse. The impatient animal was pawing up the grass under the orange-tree where he was tied. Then the faithful servant waited for me, leaning against the door of my room, holding my spurs in his hand, and having my leggings over his arms; as he put them on me, his tears fell in great drops on my feet.

"Don't cry," I said to him. "When I come back, you will be a man, and will never be separated from me again. In the mean time, all the family will think a great deal of you."

The moment had come for me to summon all my strength. My spurs rang on the parlor floor—the room was empty. The door of my mother's sewing-room was ajar. I pushed it open; she threw herself into my arms. Knowing that the expression of

her sorrow might weaken my courage, between her sobs she tried to speak to me of María, and to make me affectionate promises.

All had taken a tearful farewell. Emma, who was the last of all, perceiving that I looked about as I released myself from her embrace, pointed me to the door of the oratory. I passed through it. The yellow gleam of two candles was irradiating the altar. María was seated upon the rug, over which flowed her white dress. She gave a faint cry as she perceived me, and then let her head fall again upon the chair where she was leaning it when I entered. Hiding her face from me in that way, she held out her hand to me. Half kneeling, I bathed it in tears and covered it with caresses. As I rose, she suddenly leaped up, as if in fear that I was already going, and hung sobbing upon my neck. Until then my heart had scarcely known what sorrow was.

My lips rested upon her forehead. Startled, María drew back her head. Then, hiding her face on my breast, she stretched out her arm and pointed me to the altar. Emma came in, and caught her, fainting. She made a beseeching gesture, meaning that I was to go. I obeyed.

XLVIII.

I HAD been two weeks in London, when one night I received letters from home. With trembling hand I opened the package. There was a letter from María. Before unfolding it, I sought for traces of her perfume in it. They were there; and a bit of the calyx of a lily was folded in. My eyes were filled with mist, so that I could not read the first lines. I opened a window, as it seemed to me that I could not breathe the air in the room. Oh for the roses of the beloved garden! for my mountains! and the clear, starlit nights! The great city, still murmurous, and half cloaked in fog, seemed to be sleeping under the thick curtains of a leaden sky. A chill wind beat against my face. I closed the shutters, and was alone with my grief.

Here are some parts of María's letter:

"While they are still sitting at the table, I have come to your room to write to you. Here I can imagine that I am seeing you and talking with you. Everything is just as you left it. The last flowers which I put on your table have been falling withered to the bottom of the vase, until now not one is left. The chairs are in the same places. The books are as they were—the last one you were reading is open

on the table. Your hunting suit is where you hung it when you came from the mountain the last time. The calendar on the shelf still reads the 30th of January, that dreaded and dreadful day, now past! Even at this moment the roses at your window thrust in their branches to look for you. They quiver as I touch them, and tell them that you will return.

"Where are you? What are you doing now? It is all in vain that I asked you so many times to show me on the map where you were going, for I cannot imagine it at all. I am afraid as I think of you on that ocean, in the midst of which I see you all the time. But after you reach London, you will tell me everything. You will tell me of the landscape about the house where you live. You will describe to me all the particulars of your rooms—your furniture and ornaments. You will tell me what you do each day—when you study, when you rest, when you exercise, and when you think of your María. Tell me again what hours here correspond to those there, for I have forgotten.

"Not even Mayo forgets you. The day after you went away, he ran all over the house and garden looking for you. He went on the mountain in search of you, and when he came back, at the time of evening prayers, sat down upon the knoll, and howled. I saw him afterwards lying at your door. I opened it and he went in joyfully. But when he did not find you, after sniffing about on all sides, he

sadly came to me again, and seemed to ask after you with his eyes. He did everything but cry. When I spoke your name he lifted his head eagerly, expecting to see you come in. Poor thing! he imagines that you are hiding from him, as you used to do sometimes to tease him, and goes slowly and silently through all the rooms, hoping to surprise you.

"I did not finish this letter last night, as mamma and Emma came to look for me. They think it does me harm to be here; while, if they prevent me from coming to your room, I do not know what I should do.

"Juan woke up this morning, and asked if you had come back; in his sleep he heard me speak your name.

"The first lily has blossomed, and a piece of it goes in this letter. Aren't you sure the plant will keep on flowering? I must believe it will, as I do that the rose-bush will bear the most beautiful roses in the whole garden."

XLIX.

For a whole year I had letters from María twice a month. The last ones were filled with a melancholy so profound that the earlier ones seemed as if written in our days of undisturbed happiness.

I had in vain tried to rouse her, telling her that such sadness would injure her health, although up

to that time she said she had been well. She had replied to me: "I know that it is not very long before I shall see you. After that I can be sad no more. I shall always be with you. Nothing shall separate us again."

The letter containing these words was the only one I received from her in two months.

About the last of June, Señor A—— came to see me one afternoon. He had just arrived in Paris. I had not seen him since the winter before.

"I am bringing you some letters from home," he said, after our greeting.

"For three mails?"

"For only one. We must first have a few words," he observed, retaining the packet.

I perceived something ominous in his face, and I was troubled.

"I have come," he added, walking back and forth in the room for a few moments in silence—"I have come to help you arrange for your return to America."

"To Cauca!" I exclaimed, forgetting everything momentarily but María and my country.

"Yes," he replied; "but you must have already guessed the reason."

"My mother?" I broke in, greatly agitated.

"She is well," he answered.

"Who is it, then?" I cried, laying hold of the packet which he kept in his hands.

"No one has died."

"María! María!" I exclaimed, as if she could

run to me at the sound of my voice; and I fell helpless on a chair.

"Come," said Señor A——, "that is the reason I came. She will live if you arrive in time. Read these letters; there must be one from her here."

"Come," she wrote, "come quickly, or I shall die without seeing you. At last they consent to have me tell you the truth. For a year that disease of which happiness was curing me has been killing me. If that happiness had not been broken off, I should have lived for you.

"If you come — yes, you will come, for I have strength to endure till I see you; if you come you will find only a shadow of your María, but that shadow must embrace you before it vanishes. If I do not wait for you, if a force more mighty than my will takes me away beyond your power to revive me, takes me away without having you by to close my eyes, I shall leave with Emma to keep for you all that I know will be precious to you: the braids of my hair, the locket in which yours is with my mother's, the ring you put on my hand the night before you went away, and all your letters.

"But why do I grieve you with saying all this? If you come, I will recover strength. If I hear your voice again, if your eyes say to me only for an instant what they alone can say, I shall live, and be again as I was before. I do not wish to die. I cannot die and leave you alone forever."

"You must finish," said Señor A——, picking up

my father's letter, which had fallen at my feet. "You yourself know that there is no time to lose."

My father wrote what I had already learned in so overwhelming a manner. The doctors had but one hope of saving María; that rested in my return. Before that necessity my father did not hesitate; he commanded my immediate departure, and reproached himself for not having done so before.

Two hours afterwards I left for London.

L.

THE sun of the 25th of July was setting in the misty horizon of the sea, filling the western sky with gleaming ruby and gold. The level rays pursued the blue waves, that ran as fugitives to hide beneath the dark forests on the coast. The *Emilia López*, on board of which I had come from Panama, anchored in the Bay of Buenaventura. To those who saw her from the shore the beautiful schooner must have seemed like a handsome peasant-girl, in holiday attire, running hastily through the meadows to gather flowers for her adornment at the evening merrymaking.

Leaning against the rail, I gazed upon those mountains the very sight of which revived such sweet hopes. Seventeen months before, gliding by them, as I was borne on by the swift current of the Dagua, my heart had said good-bye to each one of them,

and their voiceless solitude had harmonized with my sorrow.

Shaking in the breeze, I held in my hand a letter from María which I had received in Panama, and which I read again in the fading twilight.

"The news of your return has been enough to give me new strength. I am counting the days now, as every one that passes brings nearer the time of my seeing you again.

"The morning has been lovely to-day—lovely as those which you have not forgotten. I had Emma lead me out into the garden. I went to its most beloved spots. Beneath those trees, surrounded by all those flowers, seeing the brook flow by, I felt almost well. If this is so already, how much better shall I not be when I can walk about with you!

"I have just hung some of our roses and lilies on the picture of the Virgin. I thought she looked at me more sweetly than usual, and that she was going to smile.

"But they want us to go to the city, as they say the doctors can treat me better there. I need no other medicine than having you with me forever. I wish to wait for you here, and not to leave all this which you loved. It seems as if you had left it in my care, and that you would not love me so much anywhere else. I shall beg papa to delay our journey, and meanwhile you will come. Good-bye."

The last lines were almost illegible.

The custom-house boat, which had left the beach

as soon as the schooner let go her anchor, was now alongside.

"Lorenzo!" I exclaimed, recognizing a dear friend in the fine mulatto who was standing up between the collector and the chief of the customs guard.

"Here I come," he answered.

Rushing up the ladder, he caught me in his arms.

"Let us not cry," he said, wiping his eyes, and forcing himself to smile; "they are watching us, and these sailors have hearts of stone."

Already he had told me, in a few words, what I was so anxious to know: María was better when he left home. Although he had been waiting for me two weeks in Buenaventura, no letters had come for me except the ones he had brought. The reason was that the family was looking for me at any minute.

Lorenzo was not a slave. A faithful companion of my father, during the time of his frequent business journeys, he was loved by the whole family, and enjoyed in our home the rights of an overseer and the privileges of a friend. In his face and figure, his strength and openness of character were revealed. Tall and strong, his forehead was broad, and his temples well filled out. His eyes were fine, and shaded by curling black eyebrows. His nose was straight and flexible, his teeth beautiful, his beard heavy, and his smile friendly.

As soon as the collector's inspection of the vessel was ended, which he hastened on my account,

my baggage was put in the boat, and I jumped in to go back with it. As we drew near the shore, the horizon had already become obscured. Smooth, dark waves passed silently by, rocking our boat and then disappearing in the darkness. Countless fire-flies flitted about above the murmurous darkness of the woods on the shore.

The collector was a citizen of doubtful age, fat and rosy. He was a friend of my father's. As soon as we landed he took me to his own house, and personally established me in the room which he had made ready for me. After hanging up a large scented hammock of palm-fibre, he went out, saying, "I am going to arrange for the passing of your baggage, and to give some still more important orders to the cook, for I do not suppose the store-rooms and pantries of the *Emilia* could have been very heavily freighted, she danced about on the waves so lightly to-day."

Although the collector was the father of a fine and interesting family in the interior of Cauca, he resolved not to bring his children to the port when he took his present office. There were a thousand reasons for this, and he told them all to me. I found them conclusive. The people on the coast, he said, seemed to him to be getting more and more light-minded, gossipy, and lazy. Still, he could not have found this so very bad, since a stay of a few months on the coast had pretty thoroughly infected the collector himself with that same laziness.

After a quarter of an hour, which I employed in changing my clothes, the collector came back to look for me. He had already put off his official uniform, and wore trousers and jacket of unexceptionable whiteness. His coat and cravat had entered upon a new period of obscurity and neglect.

"You will rest here a couple of days before continuing your journey," he said, filling two glasses with brandy, which he poured from a costly flask.

"But I do not need to rest, and I cannot," I remarked.

"Take some brandy. It is an excellent Martell. Or do you prefer something else?"

"I thought that Lorenzo had boatmen and canoes all ready for an early start to-morrow."

"We'll see about it. Well, will you have some gin or whiskey?"

"Whatever you like."

"Your health, then," he said, pledging me.

After emptying the glass at a single swallow, he winked both eyes, and asked, "Isn't that a superior article?"

Then he added, smacking his lips, "It's easy to see that you have been sampling the oldest in England."

"There are thirsty mortals everywhere. Well, I can make an early start?"

"That was all my joke," he replied, seating himself carelessly in the hammock, and wiping the sweat from his throat and forehead with a large India silk

handkerchief. "Thirst everywhere, eh? Well, water and that are the only doctors we apply to here, except a viper's bite."

"Let us talk seriously. What is that you call your joke?"

"My proposal that you should rest, man. Do you suppose your father has delayed ordering me to have everything ready for your departure? It's nearly two weeks since Lorenzo came, and a week since the boatmen were ready, and the canoe roofed over. The fact is, I ought not to have been so prompt, and then I might have got you to let me coddle you for two days."

"How much I thank you for your promptness!"

He laughed boisterously, swinging the hammock to give himself air. At last he said, "Ingrate!"

"No, it is not that. You know that I cannot, that I should not, delay a single hour more than is absolutely necessary. It is imperative that I get home very quickly."

"Yes, yes; that is true. It would be selfishness on my part," he said, quite seriously now.

"What do you know about it?"

"The disease which one of the young ladies has —but you must have received the letters I forwarded to you at Panama."

"Yes, thanks, just as I went on board."

"Do they not say that she is better?"

"They do."

"And Lorenzo?"

"He says the same."

We were both silent for a moment, and then the collector sat up in the hammock, and called, "Marcos! the dinner!"

A servant entered at once to announce that dinner was served.

"Come," said my host, rising, "I'm hungry. If you had taken the brandy you would have a fine appetite. Say," he added, addressing a servant as we entered the dining-room, "if any one comes to look for us, tell him that we are not in the house. You must go to bed early," he remarked to me, pointing me to the seat at the head of the table, "in order to get off early in the morning."

He and Lorenzo placed themselves on either side of me.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the collector, when the light of the fine table-lamp fell upon my face; "what a fuzz of a beard you have brought back! If you were not so swarthy, I could swear that you couldn't so much as say good-day in Spanish. It seems as if I were seeing your father when he was twenty—though I think you are taller than he. But for that sedateness, which I suppose you have inherited from your mother, I could believe that I was with your father when he first landed in Quibdo! Don't it seem so to you, Lorenzo?"

"Precisely," replied he.

"If you could have seen," continued my host, addressing Lorenzo, "the excitement of our little Eng-

lishman when I told him that he would have to stay two days with me. He was so vexed that he said my brandy would burn up I don't know what. I declare I was afraid he would quarrel with me. Let's see if you think the same of this wine, and if we can make you smile. How is it?" he added, after I had tasted the wine.

"It is very good."

"I was trembling for fear you would make a face over it, for it is the very best I could get for you to take with you on the river."

The collector's jollity did not flag an instant for two hours. He allowed me to go to bed at nine, promising to be up at four in the morning to go with me to the landing. As he said good-night, he added: "I hope you will not have to complain of the rats in the morning, as you did before. That bad night they gave you has cost them dear. Since then, it has been war to the death between them and me."

LI.

My good friend knocked at my door at four. I had been waiting for him an hour, all ready to set out. He, Lorenzo, and I took coffee while the boatmen were carrying my luggage to the canoes, and soon after we were all on the beach.

The moon, at the full, was already sinking in the west. As it shone out below the clouds which had

been concealing it, it bathed the distant forests, the mangrove-trees on the shores, and the smooth and quiet sea in a flush of tremulous light.

"Well, when shall I see you again?" asked the collector, as he gave me a parting embrace.

"Perhaps I shall be back very soon," I replied.

"You mean to go back to Europe, then?"

"Perhaps."

That cheerful man seemed suddenly to grow melancholy. As our canoe pushed off from the shore, he shouted, "A very prosperous journey!"

Then he called to the two boatmen, "Cortico! Laurean! take good care of him for me; take as good care of him as if he belonged to me."

"Yes, master," replied the two negroes together.

We were about two hundred yards from the beach, but I thought I could distinguish the collector's white bulk, motionless, in the spot where he had taken leave of me. The yellowish gleam of the moon, sometimes hidden, always funereal, lighted us until after we had entered the mouth of the Dagua.

I stood at the door of the rude cabin, above which arched a roof made of reeds and broad leaves thatched together. Lorenzo arranged a sort of bed for me upon some boards in that floating grotto, and sat at my feet with his head upon his knees, apparently taking a nap. Cortico (or, rather, Gregorio, as he had been baptized) was rowing near us, muttering, at intervals, a dancing tune. The athletic body of Laurean was sketched, like the profile of

a giant, against the last flush of the vanishing moon.

Almost inaudible were the monotonous and hoarse cries of the toads in the mangrove-trees on the shores, and the subdued rush of the current. Nothing else broke in upon that solemn silence which pervades the wilderness in its last sleep—a sleep always as deep as man's in the last hours of the night.

"Try a swallow, Cortico, and then you will sing that mournful song better," I said to the dwarfish boatman.

"What do you say, my master? Does that seem mournful to you?"

Lorenzo poured out of his painted horn a large amount of spirits into the *mate* which the boatman offered him. Cortico went on, "The night dew must have made me hoarse." Then he called out to his companion, "Compa'e Laurean, the white one wants you to clear your chest and sing him a jolly little dancing song."

"Do as you like," responded the one addressed, in a hoarse, resounding voice; "it's another sort of dance that's going to begin in the dark. Hadn't you seen it?"

"By the same sign, Seño'."

Laurean sampled the brandy like an expert, muttering, "No discount on that!"

"What is that about the dance in the dark?" I asked him.

For reply, he took his place and struck up the first

of the following couplets, Cortico replying with the second, and so on to the end of the wild and emotional song:

"Now the moon from us is sinking—
Row on, row on.
Of what's my lonely negress thinking?
Weep on, weep on.
Thy sable night now covers me,
Saint John, Saint John;
Thy night is no more black than she,
No more, no more.
I see the distant lightnings shine
On sea, on shore;
No brighter than those eyes of mine—
Take oar, take oar."

That chant harmonized dolorously with the nature about us; its deep and plaintive tones were repeated by the slow echoes of those immense forests.

"No more of the dance," I said to the negroes, taking advantage of the last pause.

"Does your honor think it was badly sung?" asked Gregorio, who was the more talkative one.

"No, my friend; but it's very sad."

"That jig?"

"Whatever it is."

"Praised be God! I tell you that when they sing me a fine jig, and I dance it with that dear little Mariugenia—believe what I say, your honor—the very angels in heaven beat time with their feet and want to dance it, too."

"Shut your beak and open your eye, compa'e," said Laurean. "Don't you hear it?"

"Do you think I am deaf?"

"Very well, then."

"We'll see it, Seño'."

The current of the river began to struggle with our boat. The creaking of the oars in the rowlocks could now be heard. Several times Gregorio gave a stroke with his oar on the side of the canoe, to indicate that we must change shores and cross the stream. Little by little the darkness became deeper. From the direction of the sea the roll of distant thunder reached us. The boatmen were silent. A sound like the echoing flight of a hurricane through the forests could be heard. Great drops of rain began to fall.

I lay down on the bed which Lorenzo had spread out for me. He was going to have a light, but Gregorio, seeing him strike a match, said, "Don't light the candle, boss, for it will dazzle me, and make snakes come aboard."

The rain beat fiercely on the roof of the cabin. All that darkness and quiet was pleasant to me, after the forced intercourse and pretended friendships with all sorts of people during my journey. The sweetest memories, and the gloomiest forebodings, strove for the possession of my heart to encourage or sadden it. Five days more would be enough to bring me where I could hold her in my arms again, to give back to her that life of which my absence

had robbed her. My voice, my caresses, my eyes, which had been able to move her so powerfully, would they not be able to win her back from grief and death? My memory ran over what she said in her last letter: "The news of your return has been enough to give me new strength. . . . I cannot die and leave you alone forever."

Before my imagination rose my father's house in the midst of its green hills, shaded by the aged willows, garlanded with roses, lighted up by the splendor of the rising sun. María's garments rustled near me. It was the breeze of the Zabaletas that stirred my hair. I was breathing the perfumes of María's flowers. The wilderness, with its odors and its whispers, was an accomplice in the delicious illusion.

The canoe came to a stop on a beach of the left bank.

"What is it?" I asked Lorenzo.

"We are at Arenal."

"Holloa! A guard! Smugglers are passing!" shouted Cortico.

"Halt!" answered a man, who must have been in ambush, as his voice came from very near the bank.

Both the boatmen burst into an uproarious laugh, and Gregorio said, before he was fairly through it: "Blessed Saint Paul! This Christian was going to bite me. Chief Anselmo, you'll be killed by rheumatism, putting yourself in a swamp like that. Who told you that I was going up, Seño'?"

"Rogue," replied the guard, "the witches. Let's see what you are carrying."

"It's a passenger boat."

Lorenzo had lighted the candle, and the chief entered the cabin, giving, as he passed, a resounding clap upon the negro smuggler's back, in token of affection. After giving me a frank but respectful salute, he set about examining our safe-conduct, while Laurean and Gregorio, in their breech-clouts, stood, smiling, at the entrance to the cabin.

The first shout of Gregorio had aroused the whole post. Two more guards, with sleepy faces, and armed with carbines, as was also the one who had watched, hidden under the bushes, arrived in time for a farewell drink. Lorenzo's great horn held enough for all.

The rain had ceased, and the dawn was coming on. Amid good-byes and cutting jokes, exchanged between my boatmen and the guards, and set off with something more than horse-laughs, we continued our journey.

Our progress became increasingly difficult. It was almost ten when we reached Calle-larga. There was a hut on the left bank, built, as are all along the river, on thick piles of lignum-vitæ—a wood, as is well known, that hardens under the action of water. In this way the occupants are free from floods, and on less familiar terms with vipers, whose number and variety are the terror and affliction of travellers.

Lorenzo went with the boatmen to prepare our breakfast in the tiny house. Meanwhile, I stayed in the canoe and made ready to take a bath in the transparent waters of the river. But I had not reckoned with the mosquitoes, although their poisonous bites are enough to make one remember them. They tortured me at will, making my bath lose the half of its Oriental luxury. The color and other conditions of skin possessed by the negroes are undoubtedly their defence against these hungry and persistent enemies. I noticed afterwards that my boatmen did not seem aware of their existence.

Lorenzo brought my breakfast to the canoe. Gregorio helped him. The fellow set up to be an excellent cook, and promised me a savory dish for the next day.

We were due at San Cipriano in the afternoon, and the boatmen did not need to be urged to go on, as the collector's good wine was doing its work with them.

The sun did not belie its summer reputation.

When the shores would permit of it, Lorenzo and I walked short distances along the banks—or *beached* it, as they call it. We did this partly to rest ourselves, and partly to lighten the canoe in perilous stretches of the river. At such times, however, the fear of running upon a *guascama*, or of having a black *chouta* dart upon us, made us walk through the brush more with our eyes than our feet.

It was needless to ask if Laurean and Gregorio

were amateur doctors, for there is scarcely a boatman that is not, and that does not carry with him fangs of many kinds of vipers, and antidotes for their bites. But this is hardly enough to calm a traveller, as it is well known that these remedies are without effect, and that one who has been bitten dies after a few hours, sweating blood, and in fearful agony.

We arrived at San Cipriano. On the right bank, and in the angle formed by the river that gives its name to the place, and the Dagua, was the house, raised on piles in the midst of a leafy banana orchard. We had not yet leaped out on the shore when Gregorio shouted: "'ñ'a Rufina! Here I come!"

Immediately afterwards he added, "Where did you catch this old girl?"

"Good-afternoon, 'ño' Gregorio," replied a young negress, coming out to the corridor.

"You must take me in, for I've got something nice."

"Yes, Seño'. Come on up, then."

"Where's our brother?"

"At Junta."

"Uncle Bibiano with him?"

"No, he's alone, 'ño' Gregorio."

Laurean said good-afternoon to the mistress of the house, and then relapsed into his usual silence.

While the boatmen and Lorenzo were getting the things out of the canoe, I was looking at the thing which Gregorio had called the "old girl." It was a

snake as thick as a stout arm, about three yards long, with a corrugated back of the color of dried leaves with black spots. The belly looked like a marble mosaic. The head was enormous, and the mouth was as broad as the whole head; in it showed fangs like a cat's claws. She was fastened by the neck to one of the piles of the landing, and her tail was in the water.

"Saint Paul!" exclaimed Lorenzo, as he saw what I was gazing at, "what a monster!"

Rufina, who had come down to greet me, remarked with laughter that they had sometimes killed larger ones.

"Where did they find this one?" I asked.

"On the shore, my master, there in the *chipero*," said she, pointing to a leafy tree about thirty yards away.

"When?"

"Early in the morning, when my brother was going away, he found her hanging on that tree, and he brought her in so as to get the antidote. Her mate was not there, but I saw him this morning, and my brother will catch him to-morrow."

Bibiano, the father of the young negress, who was a boatman more than fifty years old, already laid aside by rheumatism, came out to welcome me, hat in hand, and leaning upon a thick cane. His pantaloons were of yellow baize, and he wore a blue striped shirt outside them.

My hammock was soon slung. Lying in it, I

looked at the distant, untrodden mountains, lighted up by the last light of the afternoon, and watched the waters of the Dagua flow by, blue, green, and gold, under the sun's touch.

The boatmen, with their trousers now on, gossiped with Rufina. Lorenzo brought in some of his provisions to go with the stew which Bibiano's daughter was making ready for us, and then lay down quietly in the darkest corner of the room.

It was almost night when we heard cries on the river. Lorenzo ran down hurriedly. He soon came back saying that it was the mail-boat going up, and that he had been told my luggage was behind at Mondomo.

Soon the night surrounded us with all its American splendor. Why is it that nights in Cauca, in London, on the high seas, were never so majestically melancholy as that one?

At eight we were all settled for sleep. Lorenzo arranged everything for me with an almost maternal care, and then went to lie down in his own hammock.

"Little father," called out Rufina from her room, speaking to Bibiano, who was sleeping with us in the main room—"little father, just hear warty-back singing out on the river!"

In fact one could hear in that direction something like the clucking of an enormous hen.

"Tell 'ño' Laurean," went on the girl, "to go by there carefully in the morning."

"Do you hear that, man?" asked Bibiano.

"Yes, Seño'," replied Laurean. It was fitting that Rufina's voice should have awakened him, since he was, as I afterwards learned, her sweetheart.

"What is this great thing flying here?" I asked Bibiano, almost imagining that it must be a winged snake.

"A bat, little master," he answered; "but you need not be afraid of its biting you while you are sleeping in the hammock."

These bats are veritable vampires, which will bleed a man in a very short time if they can get at his nose or finger-tips. It is also a fact that one asleep in a hammock escapes their attack.

LII.

Lorenzo called me very early. It was three by my watch. Owing to the moon, the night seemed only a dull day. We set out at four, Bibiano and his daughter commending us to the care of the Virgin.

It seemed incredible that our progress should be more difficult than it had been, but it was. To the Dagua nothing is impossible.

We passed that night in Saltico, a poor and disagreeable village. From Saltico to Salto the perils of the journey were beyond all exaggeration. The craggy rocks of La Víbora, Delfina, with its clear stream bursting out of the heart of the mountains to mingle its waters timidly with the rushing flow of

the Dagua, and the Falls of Arrayán, one after the other, were passed. For an hour we had been in the midst of a violent rain-storm, and the river began to bear along bands of foam and small bushes.

"The girl is jealous," said Gregorio, as we pushed up to a beach.

I thought he referred to a sombre and muffled music that seemed to come from a neighboring hut.

"What girl is that?" I asked.

"Why, Pepita, my master."

Then I understood that he meant the beautiful river of that name, which flows into the Dagua below the village of Juntas.

"Why is she jealous?"

"Don't your honor see what is going down?"

"No."

"The freshet."

"And why is not Dagua the jealous one? She is very lovely and better than he."

Gregorio laughed and replied: "Dagua has a very bad temper. Pepita sends down a freshet to make the river flow as yellow as herself."

Urged on by Lorenzo and the extra pay he had promised them, the boatmen exerted themselves to get me to Juntas before dark. Soon after we passed the little plain of Sombrerillo, whose verdure was in contrast with the barrenness of the mountains which shaded it on the south. It was four when we passed by the foot of the dangerous rocks of Media-luna.

Shortly afterwards we emerged from the dreaded Credo, and at last we made a happy end of our strange trip, leaping out on the shore at Juntas.

D——, a former servant of my father's, was expecting us, having been informed by the mail-carrier, who passed us at San Cipriano, that I would arrive that afternoon. He led me to his house, where I waited for Lorenzo and the boatmen. The latter were well satisfied with "my person," as Gregorio expressed it. They would have to make an early start the next day, and took leave of me in the most cordial manner, wishing me good health, and carrying back for me a letter to the collector.

LIII.

As we sat down at the table I told D—— that I wished to continue the journey the same afternoon, if it was possible. I besought him to overcome the difficulties in the way of that plan. He consulted with Lorenzo, who soon told me that the mules were in the village, and that there would be moonlight. I gave orders for our immediate departure; and in view of my decided manner, D—— made no objection.

Shortly afterwards Lorenzo brought me a riding suit, telling me in a low voice how glad he was that we were not to spend the night in Juntas. We arranged with D—— to pay for the transport of my

baggage up to that point, and to forward it after us, and then took leave of him. We were mounted on good mules, and a boy rode behind us on another, carrying a small pair of saddle-bags containing my clothes and some provisions which our host had pressed upon us.

By sunset we had ascended more than half of the Puerta slope. Whenever my mule stopped to take breath, I could only look back with satisfaction at the low ground whence we had come, and drank in with delight the stimulating air of the sierra. For the first time since my departure from London I felt that it was within my power to shorten the distance which separated me from María. The certainty that two days more would bring me to the end of my journey would have been enough to make me wear out four such mules as the one I was riding. Lorenzo, who knew the result of such eagerness on such roads, tried to make me moderate my pace somewhat, and with the justifiable pretext of showing me the way, rode in front the rest of the time we were going up the hill.

When we reached Hormigero, we were following the path by the light of the moon. I paused, for Lorenzo had leaped to the ground there, stirring up the dogs at the house as he did so. He leaned against my mule's neck, and said to me, smiling: "Do you think it would be a good thing to sleep here? They are good people, and have pasture for the animals."

"Don't be lazy," I replied. "I am not sleepy, and the mules are fresh."

"Don't be anxious," he said, holding my stirrup for me to dismount; "all I want is to examine these traitors for fear that they will give out on our hands, they are such fat fellows. Justo is coming to Juntas with my mules," he continued, loosening the cinch on mine, "and, according to that boy we met at Puerta, ought to put up to-night at Santana, unless he gets as far as Hojas. Wherever we meet him, we will take chocolate and sleep a minute. Does that plan suit you?"

"Of course. We must get to Cali by to-morrow afternoon."

"Not quite so soon. We shall be getting into San Francisco at about seven, but only by going at my gait; otherwise we may be thankful to get as far as San Antonio."

Busy while he was speaking, he bathed the mules' loins with spirits. Then he lit a cigar, threw a rebuke at the boy who was getting behind, because, he said, his mule was slow; and we resumed our journey, the curs at the house barking maledictions at us.

Although the road was good—that is to say, dry—we could not reach Hojas until after ten. Upon a level spot at the top of the ridge was a bit of white canvas. Lorenzo scrutinized the mules which were grazing along the edges of the path, and said, "Justo is here, for there go Tamborero and Frontino, and they never stray."

"Who are they?" I asked him.

"Oh, mules of mine."

Deep silence was over the encampment of mule-drivers. A cold wind blew down through the ravines of the adjoining mountain slope, brightening up at times the dying embers of two fires near the tent. Close to one of them a black dog was curled up, who growled as he perceived us, and barked when he saw that we were strangers.

"*Ave María!*" shouted Lorenzo, in those words giving to the mule-drivers the salute which they are accustomed to use when arriving at an inn. "Be quiet, Barbillas!" he added, speaking to the dog, and dismounting.

A tall and thin mulatto came out from among the tobacco-sacks which closed up the two sides of the canvas where it did not reach the ground. It was the head-driver, Justo.

"Holloa, 'ñor Lorenzo!" he said to his employer, as he recognized him, and added, "Isn't this boy Efraín?"

We returned his greeting—Lorenzo with a thump on the back and a jest, I as heartily as my stiffness would let me.

"Dismount," continued Justo, "you've got some tired mules there."

"Yours must be the tired ones," replied Lorenzo; "for they travel at an ant's pace."

"You'll soon see that they don't. But what are you doing riding at this time of night?"

"Getting over the ground while you are snoring. Leave off your talking, and have your guide poke up the fire and make us some chocolate."

The other mule-drivers had awakened, as had also the negro boy who was to rekindle the fire. Justo lighted a candle-end and stuck it in a banana hollowed out for the purpose. Then he spread out on the ground a packing-skin for me to sit on.

"How far are you going to-night?" he asked, while Lorenzo was taking out of his saddle-bags some food to go with the chocolate.

"To Santana," replied the latter. "How are the young she-mules? García's boy told me, as we left Juntas, that the bay one had given out on your hands."

"She is the only cheat, but got here little by little."

"You mustn't make them carry heavy bales."

"As if I would be so rash! But the she-devils are coming out all right. The cream-color, I must say, played me the very deuce of a trick in Santarosa. Never was such a slow-going beast—and vicious! But she had to give in. She brought the provisions all the way from Platanares."

The pot of boiling chocolate now appeared, and the mule-drivers hastened to offer us the gourd-cups from their belts, that we might partake of it.

"So help me!" said Justo, while I was tasting the chocolate, made and served in mule-driver style, it is true, but the most acceptable I had ever had;

"who ever would have known the boy Efraín? He will use up 'ñor Lorenzo, won't he?"

In exchange for the lukewarm water of their gourds, we gave Justo and his men some good brandy, and made ready to go on.

"It's almost eleven," said the head-driver, standing up to look at the moon, whose white light was bathing the high slopes of Chaucos and Bitaco.

I looked at my watch, and, in fact, it was just eleven. We took leave of the drivers, but when we were about fifty yards from their camp Justo called Lorenzo back. The latter overtook me, however, a few minutes afterwards.

LIV.

At four of the next afternoon I reached the summit of the Cruces. There I dismounted to tread again the soil whence I had said farewell to my native country. Again I saw the valley of Cauca, a land as fair as I was unfortunate. So often had I dreamed of beholding it from that very mountain that even when I saw it before me in all its beauty I looked around to make sure that it was not a trick of sleep. My heart beat faster, as if it had a presentiment that María's head would soon rest upon it. My eyes were fixed on the hills at the foot of the far sierra—hills now in the full light of the afternoon sun—where my father's house was whitening.

Lorenzo had just caught up with me, leading by the halter a fine white horse which he had got in Tocotá for me to mount, the last three leagues of the day's ride.

"Just think!" I said to him, pointing to the white spot on the sierra, from which I could not remove my eyes; "to-morrow at this time we shall be there."

"Why, where?" he replied.

"What!"

"The family is in Cali."

"Why didn't you tell me? What did they come for?"

"Justo told me last night that the Señorita is still very sick."

As Lorenzo said this he turned away his head, and seemed much affected.

Trembling, I mounted the horse, and the spirited animal almost flew down the stony path.

The afternoon was expiring when I turned the last promontory of the Montañuelas. A rush of wind from the west was whistling about me among the rocks and thickets, and rumpling my horse's flowing mane. My father's house could no longer be seen on the edge of the horizon at my left; but on the right, far away, under a turquoise sky, was the glint of Huila's bulk, half covered by floating haze.

He who created that, I said to myself, cannot yet destroy the most beautiful of His creatures, whom

He has permitted me to love so much. Again I forced back the sobs that were choking me.

I had now passed on my left the pleasant and beautiful valley of Peñon, worthy of its lovely river. The city had gone to sleep upon its green and cushioned breast. Like a flock of great birds soaring in search of their nests, the foliage of the palms could be seen above it, lighted up by the moon.

It took all my courage to knock at the door of the house. A servant let me in. Leaping down, I flung him the bridle, and hastily rushed through the entrance and the corridor leading to the parlor. It was in darkness. I had taken a few steps in it when I heard a cry, and felt myself embraced.

"María! My María!" I exclaimed, pressing to my heart that head abandoned to my caresses.

"Alas! no, no. My God!" I was interrupted by a sobbing voice.

Loosening her arms from my neck, she fell upon the sofa. It was Emma. She was dressed in black. The moon showed her face, pale and wet with tears.

At that moment the door of my mother's room opened. Uttering incoherent cries, and kissing me repeatedly, she bore me to the seat where Emma was sitting silent and motionless.

"Where is she, then? Where is she?" I cried, rising to my feet.

"My darling boy!" exclaimed my mother, in a

tone of the deepest tenderness, pressing me to her bosom again, "in heaven!"

Something like the cold blade of a dagger pierced my brain. I could not see or breathe. It was Death wounding me. Cruel and implacable, why did he not kill?

LV.

I COULD not tell what had happened, when I awoke one night on a bed surrounded by objects and persons that I could scarcely distinguish. A shaded lamp, whose light made the curtains of my bed the more opaque, diffused a faint gleam throughout the silent room. I tried in vain to sit up. I called, and felt my hands pressed. I called again, and the name I feebly pronounced brought a sob for an answer. Turning to the side from which it came, I recognized my mother. Her anxious and tearful eyes were fixed on my face. In the softest voice, she asked me many times if I was better.

"So it is true, then?" I said to her, when the confused remembrance of the last time I had seen her came to me.

Without replying, she laid her head on the pillow beside mine. After a few minutes of silence, I was cruel enough to say: "So they deceived me! What have I come for?"

"Haven't I suffered, too?" she interrupted me, her tears falling on my neck.

But all her sorrow and tenderness could not bring any to my eyes.

It was evident they were trying to guard against any strong emotion, for, a little afterwards, my father came in silently, and pressed my hand while he wiped his eyes, about which I saw the dark circles of sleeplessness.

My mother, Eloisa, and Emma took turns that night in watching by my bed, after the doctor had gone away promising a slow but certain recovery. Uselessly they exerted every effort to induce me to go to sleep. When my mother at last fell asleep herself, worn out by fatigue, I guessed that I had been home more than twenty-four hours.

Emma knew the only thing I wanted to learn—the history of her last days, and her last words. I felt that I had not courage to hear, yet I could not control my desire to know the sorrowful details; and I asked her often to tell me. She would only reply to me, in the tone of a mother putting her child to sleep in his cradle, "In the morning."

LVI.

Two months had passed over her grave, and my lips had not murmured a prayer over her. I still felt myself too weak to visit the abandoned house where we had loved each other, or to gaze upon that tomb which hid her from my eyes and denied her

to my arms. Yet she must be waiting for me there. There were the mournful farewell gifts she had left for me.

Only by degrees did Emma drop into my heart all the bitterness of María's last messages to me.

The morning after María had written me her last letter, Emma found her seated on the stone bench in the garden. She had been weeping.

"Why did you come alone to-day?" asked Emma. "I wanted to come with you, as I did yesterday."

"Yes," she replied, "I knew it; but I wanted to come alone. I thought I should be strong enough. Help me walk."

She leaned on Emma's arm and went to the rose-bush before my window. María looked at it with a smile, and said, as she picked the two freshest roses: "Perhaps they will be the last. See how many buds there are!"

Drawing the most heavily loaded branch to her cheek, she added: "Farewell, my rose! You will tell him that I took care of it as long as I could," she said, turning to Emma, who was weeping with her.

My sister tried to lead her from the garden, saying: "Why do you sadden yourself so? Has not papa agreed to delay our going? We will come here every day. Isn't it true that you feel better?"

"Let us stay here longer," she replied, slowly going up to my window. Forgetting Emma, she leaned over, and picked all the lilies on her favorite

plant, saying to my sister: "Tell him that it never stopped flowering. Now we will go."

She stopped again by the brook, and leaned her face against Emma's bosom, murmuring, "I do not want to die without seeing him here again."

During the day she was more sad and quiet than usual. At twilight, Emma found her in my room, leaning out of the window.

"María," she said, "won't this night-wind do you harm?"

She was startled at first, but drew my sister to her side on the sofa, and said, "Nothing can do me harm any more."

"Sha'n't we go to the oratory?"

"Not now. I want to stay here longer. I have so many things to say to you."

"Can't you tell me somewhere else? You will frustrate all the doctor's care. For two days you have not been as obedient to him as you were."

"They do not know that I am going to die," she replied, sobbing upon Emma's breast.

"Going to die! Going to die when Efraín is almost home?"

"I shall never see him again—I do not dare to hope for it. This is terrible, but it is certain. I have never felt the symptoms of my attack as I feel them now. I want you to know everything before it is too late for me to tell you. Listen: I want to leave for him everything I have which he has been fond of. Put in the little box where I keep his let-

ters this locket and this ring—he gave it to me the night before he went away. In my blue apron wrap up my hair. Don't feel so badly," she said, laying her cold cheek against my sister's, "I cannot now be his wife. God has been pleased to deliver him from the grief of seeing me as I am, from the trial of seeing me die. Alas! I could die happy if I could give him my last farewell. Take him in your arms, and tell him that I struggled in vain not to leave him—that I dreaded his loneliness more than death, and—"

María stopped speaking, and sank into Emma's arms. My sister kissed her, but found her limp. She called, but could get no answer. She screamed, and they came to her aid.

All the doctor's efforts to bring her out of the seizure were in vain, and the next morning he declared himself unable to save her life.

* * * * * * *

Braulio, José, and four peasants bore the corpse to the village, crossing those plains and resting under those trees where María had gone by my side, so loving and loved, the day of Tránsito's wedding. My father and the priest followed the humble convoy, step by step.

My father came back at mid-day, slowly and alone. While dismounting from his horse, he tried in vain to repress his sobs. Seated in the parlor, between Emma and my mother, and surrounded by the children, who were vainly awaiting his caress, he gave

way to his grief. "I," he said—"I, the author of that cursed journey, have killed her. If Salomón could come to me to ask for his daughter, what could I say to him? And Efraín! Efraín! Alas! to what have I summoned him? Is this the way I shall fulfil my promises?"

That afternoon they left the farm on the sierra, and passed the night in the valley, intending to go to the city the next day.

Braulio and Tránsito consented to occupy the house, and take care of it during the absence of the family.

LVII.

On the 10th of September, two months after María's death, I had from Emma the last of that story which she had kept from giving me as long as possible. It was in the evening, and Juan was asleep upon my knees; he had fallen into the custom since my return, as if he instinctively guessed that I would try to make up for him María's love and care.

Emma gave me the key of the closet, in the house on the sierra, in which were kept María's clothes and all that she had especially left for me.

Early the next morning I set out for Santa ——, where my father had been staying for two weeks. He had made all arrangements for my return to Europe, upon which I was to start the eighteenth of that month.

At four in the afternoon of the twelfth I took leave of my father, making him believe that I wanted to spend the night with Cárlos, so as to get to Cali earlier in the morning. He had in his hand a sealed packet, which he gave to me, saying: "It is to go to Kingston. It is Salomón's last will and his daughter's dowry papers. If my regard for your interests," he added, in a trembling voice, "made me separate you from her, and hasten her death, perhaps, you will know how to forgive me. Who can do it, if not you?"

Profoundly moved by this affectionate and humble confession, I gave him a reply which made him take me again in his arms. I can still hear the accent of his last farewell.

Riding out into the plain, after fording the Amaime, I waited for Juan Ángel, to tell him to take the mountain road.

I began to hear the sound of the Zabaletas. I could see the tops of the willows. There, at a few steps from the path, was the broad stone which so often had been our seat. At last I was close to the garden, the confidant of our love. The turtle-doves were flying about among the orange-trees. The wind was flinging down dry leaves on the paving.

I leaped from my horse and left him to his own will. I had neither voice nor strength to call out. I sat down on the stair where so many times her affectionate voice and loving eyes had said good-bye to me.

A little later, when it was almost night, I heard steps near me. It was an old slave, who had seen my horse loose, and had come to see who his owner was. Mayo followed her painfully. The sight of that dog, friend of my childhood, companion of my days of happiness, made me groan. He put up his head for me to pat, licked the dust from my boots, and sitting down at my feet, whined sorrowfully.

The slave-woman brought me the keys of the house, and told me that Braulio and Tránsito were on the mountain. I went into the parlor and walked several steps without being able to distinguish anything with my misty eyes. I fell upon the sofa where I first told her of my love.

When I lifted my face it was perfectly dark. I opened the door of my mother's room, and my spurs echoed dismally in that cold spot, smelling of the grave. Then a new pang of grief led me to hurry to the oratory. I was going to ask God for her back again. I was going to look for her where I had held her in my arms, where my lips had rested upon her forehead for the first time. The moon had risen, and its light, entering in through the half-opened lattice, showed all I should find—the funeral drapings on the table where her coffin had rested!

I saw a light in my mother's room; Juan Ángel had just placed a candle on the table. I took it up, motioning to him not to follow me, and went to María's room. A trace of her perfume was there. Her crucifix was still on the table, withered flowers at

its foot. I opened the closet; it exhaled the loved fragrance. My hands and lips were pressed to those garments which I knew so well. I drew out the drawer of which Emma had told me; the precious box was in it. A cry escaped me, and a shadow fell upon my eyes as those braids, which still seemed to know my kisses, unrolled in my hands.

An hour later— My God! thou knowest it all! I had run through the garden calling her, asking her of the trees that had sheltered us, and of the waste whose echoes could only give me back her name. At the edge of the ravine, lined with rose-bushes, in whose jagged bottom lay the mist and thundered the river, a criminal idea for a moment dried my tears and cooled my brow.

A person hidden from me by the rose-bushes spoke my name. It was Tránsito. As she came up to me she stood for a few moments in amazement; she must have been frightened at my face. The bitter reply I made to her, when she besought me to leave that spot, revealed to her, perhaps, the disgust with life which I then felt. The poor girl began to cry, and urged me no more for a moment; but soon she got fresh courage and said, with hesitation, in the grieving voice of a complaining slave, "Don't you want to see Braulio either, nor even my child?"

"Don't cry, Tránsito, and forgive me," I said. "Where are they?"

She took my hand, and led me to the corridor, where her husband was waiting for me. After I had

embraced Braulio, Tránsito laid on my knees a pretty baby, six months old, and kneeling at my feet, smiled in pleasure to see me caress her little boy.

LVIII.

NEVER to be forgotten is that last night passed in the home where I spent the years of my childhood and the happy days of my youth. As a bird driven by the hurricane out upon the parched plains tries in vain to direct its flight towards the shade of its native woods, so my buffeted soul goes in the hours of sleep to wander about what was once the home of my parents. Leafy orange-trees, graceful willows, that grew up together with me, how old you must have grown! María's roses and lilies, who will love them? Odors of the luxuriant garden, I shall never breathe you again! Whispering winds, murmurous river—I shall hear them no more!

Midnight found me watching in my room. Everything was as I had left it. On the table was the package of letters which she had returned to me on her death. I opened it. Those lines written by me when I was so far from thinking they would be my last words to her; those sheets which had been pressed to her bosom, I unfolded and read, one after the other. Looking among María's letters for the answer to each one I had written her, I put together that dialogue of deathless love, inspired by hope, and broken off by death.

Holding in my hands María's braids, I lay down upon the sofa on which Emma had heard her last messages. The clock struck two. It was the same that had measured the hours of that sorrowful night before I went away; it was fitting that it should do the same for the last night I passed in the dwelling of my ancestors.

I dreamed that María was my wife. That pure dream had been, and was to continue, the only delight of my soul. She wore a filmy white dress, and an apron as blue as if it had been made of a piece of the sky—the same which I had so often helped her fill with flowers. She carefully pushed open the door of my room, and, trying not to make the least rustling with her garments, kneeled down on the rug at the foot of the sofa. Then she looked at me, half smiling, as if she feared my sleep might be feigned, and touched my forehead with lips as soft as the velvet of a Páez iris. Less fearful now that I was deceiving her, she let me drink in for a moment her warm and fragrant breath. Still seated on the rug, she took my hand and pressed it to her cheek. She leaned her head upon my breast and—

A cry—it was mine—broke off that dream. The lamp had burned out. The cold morning wind came in through the window. My numb hands were clasping her hair, the only reality of my dream.

LIX.

That afternoon I set out on my return to the city, intending to pass by the cemetery where was María's grave. Juan Ángel and Braulio had gone on ahead to wait for me there, and José, his wife, and his daughters were around me to receive my farewell. On my invitation they all went with me to the oratory, and, kneeling and weeping, we prayed for the soul of her we had so much loved. José broke in upon the silence which followed this solemn prayer, to offer a supplication to the protectress of travellers on land and sea.

I had no voice to say a last friendly word to José and his daughters. They would have had none to reply to me.

A few rods distant from the house, I paused at the beginning of the descent to take one more look at the beloved home and its surroundings. Of the hours of happiness which I had passed in it I was carrying with me only the memory; of María, only the gifts which she had left for me when on the edge of her grave.

Then Mayo came up, and stopped, tired out, at the shore of the stream between us. Twice he tried to wade it, but both times had to give it up.

He sat down upon the turf and howled piteously, as if to reproach me for abandoning him in his old age.

After a ride of an hour and a half I dismounted at the entrance to a sort of garden, lying by itself in the plain, and surrounded with palings. It was the village cemetery. Braulio took my horse, and, sharing the emotion which he perceived on my face, opened one of the gates, but did not go in himself. I passed on through the bushes, and among the wooden crosses rising above them. As I rounded a clump of large tamarinds I came upon a white pedestal, spotted by the rains, on which was erected an iron cross. I went up to it. On a black tablet, which the poppies half hid already, I began to read, "María—"

To that terrible monologue of the soul in the presence of death — of the soul which questions, which curses, which begs, which cries out—that cold and deaf grave, which my arms were embracing and my tears bathing, gave a reply all too eloquent.

The noise of steps on the leaves made me raise my head. Braulio came up to me, and gave me a crown of roses and lilies, the gift of José's daughters. He remained, as if to hint to me that it was time to go. I stood up and hung the flowers on the cross. Then I gave to María and her grave a last farewell.

I had already mounted my horse, and Braulio was pressing my hand, when a bird flew over our heads

with a sinister croak well known to me. I saw her fly to the iron cross, alight upon one of its arms, flap her wings, and heard again her terrifying cry.

Torn with emotion, I set out at a gallop over the lonely plain, whose vast horizon the night was darkening.

THE END.

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